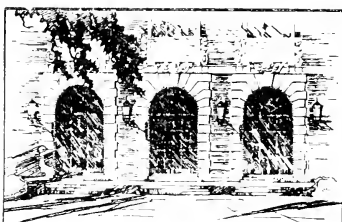


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I N G E L H E I M

"*Physician*. Time is a skilful weaver, but there is a saying your Majesty may have heard, that he does not work until we have ceased to watch him.

"*Queen*. True, and yet let him work as skilfully as may be, he does, at the best, but put a patch into our torn raiment. The thorns and briars of the world have done their evil work : he cannot make whole again, he can only disguise ; the rent remains for all his workmanship.

"*Physician*. Alas ! your Majesty, the hour soon comes in which we realise that we cannot find our way through the world with untorn garments, and so learn to be grateful even for the patches of the great weaver."—FROM THE COURT PHYSICIAN.

I N G E L H E I M

BY THE
AUTHOR OF 'MISS MOLLY'

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. I.

WILLIAM BLACKWOOD AND SONS
EDINBURGH AND LONDON
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TO

S. A. R.

MARIE ADELGONDE,
PRINCESSE HENRI DE BOURBON,
COMTESSE DE BARDI,

IN AFFECTIONATE REMEMBRANCE.

PROLOGUE.

It was the first night of a new comedy,—a comedy about which had been uttered a sufficient number of prophecies to create a demand for places, that put those who had obtained them in the position of having achieved reflected renown. The theatre was small, and would therefore only admit a limited number; but those who had gained an entrance represented the fashionable ranks of Paris, and were drawn thither in the hope of seeing themselves—their follies and failings — skilfully portrayed by one who had lived amongst them, and had watched them with a view to future delineation. Hence the eagerness with which they had assembled, every one expecting that the study of his neighbours' foibles would ensure a couple of hours' delight. Rumour even whispered that the Emperor had himself promised to be present, and many eager eyes were directed to the Imperial box when the door of it was

opened, and an attendant appeared therein; but it was not the stern familiar face that appeared there a few minutes later, but a tall beautiful woman, with straight black brows and hair dark as night, amid which diamonds shone—a woman alone unsmiling amid all the laughing talking throng, her sombre garments contrasting strangely with the brilliancy and gaiety of her surroundings. With her were two men, the one a fine-looking elderly greybeard, whose hair had once been black as hers, whose dark eyes looked forth from under just such level brows; the other also dark-haired and dark-eyed, but with all the difference that lies between the north and south. The woman's black eyes were an accident due to some far-off ancestress, and only accentuated the brilliant fairness of her complexion, — in the younger man's case they harmonised with the rich southern colouring, soft and warm, of the land that had given him birth.

A couple of years previously, the beautiful daughter of Lord Ashton had married Juan, Count de Miramar. It had been a love-match, a perfectly happy marriage; scarcely had there been one, almost unavoidable jar consequent on marrying a foreigner, for so long had Justine Ashton lived in Spain, that differences for her had virtually ceased to exist.

Life had gone so smoothly, reflected in the sunshine of an adoring husband's love and care, that the possibility of clouds and tempests had been for-

gotten until the day broke on which the thunder-bolt fell.

To rise a happy, loved wife, with a fair little daughter, in whose eyes it was growing possible to watch for the light that had gladdened her heart in the husband's; to feel that one day this little child that was her heart's joy would surely grow to be a lovely woman; and then in a few short hours for it all to pass out of her life,—the present with its immediate joy and the future promise of happiness alike. Not by death's calming hand; since, in her anguish and despair she had felt that even that, with its certain knowledge, would have been better than the awful doubt with which her life must always walk step by step.

And yet, when she pictured the dark eyes closed, and the baby limbs cold under restless waters, she would shrink away back to the side of the other companion who held the secret of her baby's fate.

Lost! That was the beginning and the end of all the questionings and strivings. No clue had reached her hands, no voice come back in answer to the promised reward or to the mother's prayers, to say where her little one was that evening when the sun set.

For months now she had stood apart from the world nursing her sorrow, and it was only for the sake of the one voice she never could resist that she had accompanied him hither to-night. He had begged of her to come, and she had obeyed, because

to obey him was the only happiness the world still held for her ; but through all the glare and brilliance the one memory haunted her, forbidding smiles, rendering laughter out of place.

To-night—here—whilst she sat and strove to be amused, where and how was her little child ?

On her way she had shuddered, looking out on to the cold frosty street, as she noted in the sudden gleam of light some poor, scantily clothed woman holding a baby to her breast ; only that afternoon her eyes had filled with tears at the sight of a little hungry-looking child dancing to a man's unmelodious music in the open street, smiling its unchild-like smiles for the pennies compassionate passers-by tossed into its little thin hands. She had paused in her walk and drawn near, mingling with the noisy applauding crowd, and had then turned away with an aching heart, because the eyes that had met her own, singling her out in her rich attire, were set under brows as dark as night.

Other mothers, lonely, childless as she was, could think with an aching heart of the rest their little ones had gained, of the soft turf or the white snow that lay between them—a strong protecting shield—and the cruel world. Why, ah why to her was no such comfort granted !

So strong was the love this man by her side felt for her, that it was sometimes as if in truth no veil fell between his heart and hers. He knew through his love, as her eyes met his with an answering

tender smile, the pain at her heart ; was conscious of that ever-present ache which for his sake she would have been glad sometimes to put aside.

In responsive sympathy a mist crept between him and the smiling crowd around, whilst once again in memory he trod the weary past, striving to discover if any faintest thing had been left undone that might have brought back the smiles to this loved woman—smiles which should not only come in answer to his own anxious looks ; but it was a vain effort.

If the child lived, such was his own innermost thought, all that had been done and promised would have brought it back to its mother's arms.

There was only Death who could have proved thus relentless.

To whom else would it have borne any value ? To any one else the sole value it could possess must be the cords that bound it to its mother's heart—the sole wish to break that heart. No, no: it was death, not life, that had intervened ; death under some dark inscrutable form, that would never lift the shrouding veil which hid where the child slept.

But better that than vague ideas of human revenge.

Revenge !—the word startled him. So far had his thoughts carried him, that he had scarcely noted the cessation of the music, the sudden silence on which the word—had it indeed only floated through his brain, not been spoken aloud—had fallen. Something had emphasised it—some swift look

from a pair of eyes beneath, that had met his own for a moment out of the shadows below, and which he had lost again.

But the look had turned the current of his thoughts. In a moment it had swept away his surroundings, and had conjured up a totally different scene, which he almost fancied he had forgotten, till Memory, treacherous Memory, lifted her wand as those eyes met his.

The music was hushed, the lights out, all the crowd of fashionable beauties and idle men of the world had vanished into the semi-darkness in which he stood, amid the knick-knacks and gaudiness of a small firelit boudoir, listening to a passionate voice that rose and fell almost as if in unison with the rising and falling flames of a dying fire, and a voice that matched the eyes. The fireglow revealed a slender figure, a small head crowned with thick chestnut hair, slight hands that were clasped to her heart as if to quiet its pulsations.

“Speak to me—tell me!”

The voice died away into a pleading cry.

“Yes,” the man’s voice came coldly and swiftly, “I am going to be married.”

“And you have not told me?”

“You would have known. Had you not sent for me now I would have written.”

“Coward! coward!”

The words came from her lips, from which the colour had faded, like a threat.

“After all—that is the way you would have ended it, you would have *written*. Ah!” flinging her arms abroad with a passionate gesture, “there is no cowardice to equal a man’s.”

“What would you have had me do? I would have spared us both.”

“Spared *us*,” she repeated. “How much have you spared me? You have spoilt my whole life, and then talk of sparing. But don’t imagine it is your ceasing to love me that I blame you for: it is your cowardice in leaving me to hear of it from strangers’ tongues, as I have heard it. Sparing indeed! It is yourself you have striven to spare, but do not think you will succeed. You shall pay bitterly, bitterly for all you have done, and left undone.”

No answer fell from the man’s lips.

The woman’s low utterances rang throbbing with pain through the silence of the little room. When she ceased speaking, the man, still without a word, moved towards the door.

But seeing his intention, she was too swift for him—with a few rapid steps she placed her slight figure against it, facing him. “Speak! say something!—you shall not go like this.”

“What would you have me say?”

“Anything. The truth, if you can and will. *I* will say it for you,” in a taunting tone. “You are tired of me, and therefore sorry you persuaded me to leave the home where—if I was not happy—I was at least respected. An unhappy English gover-

ness in a strange land, surrounded by foreigners, is an easy woman to persuade. Love is as good a persuader as any other: if I believed you, more fool I."

"I did love you." His voice was unsteady, his eyes did not meet hers.

"You *did*," she repeated; "there is no past tense in love;—you thought you did, and it is I who suffer through your mistake."

Then, with a swift change of tone, the passion dying out of eyes and voice,—“Ah yes, you did. I am dreaming now, or mad—you do. This marriage: it is a necessity, an evil forced upon you—you do not love her.”

“Leave her name alone; it is not of her I wish to speak, it is of you.”

“I understand.” The softness vanishing, the lines of the face growing hard. “She is your future, your glad happy future. I am the past, the miserable shameful past, which must somehow be buried out of sight. Take care!” bending suddenly forward, while a sudden flame from the fire showed an evil light in the eyes, “take care! Sometimes it is not easy to bury the past; it has been known to reach forward and kill the future.”

So much had happened since he had heard those words. At the time he had listened to them as to the vague threats of an angry woman; he had thought they were forgotten, until of a sudden in the midst of this crowded theatre they had seemed

to sound through the silent house as if they had been spoken aloud.

What had conjured them up? To something touching his brain with a reminder of the past, he owed them.

The expression of those eyes that had for an instant flashed upon him out of the dark shadowy corner,—an expression, some casual momentary likeness.

He bent forward, watching the dark corner below. Had it all been a hallucination? No, even as he looked there was a quick upward glance,—no mistaking it now, though the face was different, more marked and worn than he remembered it, still the same, the same red lights in the thick waves of hair, though it was scarcely this he saw, but the expression in the eyes that glanced from him to the heart-broken woman by his side, that served as a revelation.

He might be mistaken—so often he had been in this last terrible year, but here was a chance, or so he thought.

Before she should have time to escape or be suspicious, he would seek her out and force her to speak. In the meantime he turned his eyes resolutely to the stage, awaiting the end of the act, which was now close at hand.

It was over now. The curtain had fallen, this was his opportunity. He turned slowly with some light excuse to the woman by his side—

“I fancied I recognised a face in the crowd below, there will be time before the next act for me to go and see.”

Underneath, amid the noise and confusion that followed the end of the act, with every one moving hither and thither, it was easy to make his way unobserved across the theatre. For a moment he glanced upwards towards the box he had left; noted the beautiful statuesque figure, the sad quiet face, which brightened into a shadowy smile as their eyes met,—and then he pursued his way.

She towards whom his thoughts and looks were turned was apparently unaware of his proximity. She was still in the same corner, one of a numerous crowd who had contented themselves with camp-stools and chairs placed down the narrow passages, to allow a greater number of spectators to witness the piece of the hour.

Standing up, she was now surveying the house, and again as her eyes fell on the black-robed lady in the box above, eyes and mouth took that strange expression of mocking exultant satisfaction.

His heart-beats quickened; after so much trouble and heartbreak, so much vain seeking, was it possible that the clue at length lay within his grasp? Once touch it, then nothing—no power on earth—should persuade him to abandon it, till all she could tell was told. Threats, pleadings—there was nothing he would not make use of to restore the smiles once more to the woman he loved. Hard, cold as she might

be—might have become—she was a woman, and surely could be touched by another woman's woe.

So thick was the crowd that he was stopped here, and time given him to plan in imagination how he should begin his speech, in what words express how he had translated the looks that he had intercepted; and as he stood thus debating, thinking,—in no wise hurried, because she whom he watched had evidently no thought of quitting her place,—a sudden, quick, awful cry resounded, which brought back his scattered thoughts, and for the moment banished everything else.

“Fire! fire!”

That one second's breathless pause, and then he was one of a maddened terrified crowd, forcing their way, regardless of their own safety or any one else's, towards the nearest exit.

He was aware that behind him from the stage came a thick cloud of smoke, forced through by a tongue of flame, but the screams and cries of those around made it impossible to realise the extent of the danger. He was also aware of a man's figure, which for a moment appeared, amid the smoke, on the stage, gesticulating, calling—words, movements alike lost on the struggling crowd, of which he was one of the centre figures.

Instinctively, amid all his own anxiety, he glanced overhead to the box he had left. It was empty. In that desperate moment he lifted his heart in a quick prayer that she had found a swift road to safety.

Then he was back once more in the midst of his own danger, with all his senses quickened to the small chance of life that remained in this terror-stricken mob, growing desperate now, as the smoke closed about them, poisoning the air.

Women and weakly men were slipping and falling, reducing the chances of escape for all alike; but Juan Miramar was tall and strong, and able to struggle on, though even on him the want of air was beginning to tell.

But there were merely a few steps now between him and a possible door of escape; and recognising that fact, he glanced towards where so often this evening his looks had been bent. She was there still. Almost in the same position, only standing a little closer up to the wall, her face scarcely whiter than it had been, only her eyes had lost the expression which had attracted him. They were now wild and despairing, as she shrank back from the struggling crowd.

Even in that supreme moment he had a thought of not letting her go out of his sight, carrying her secret with her.

The crowd was bearing her with it, faint, unresisting; in a moment they would meet face to face. Even there and then he would put his question. Another few steps, that was all.

The smoke was growing thicker, more blinding; he staggered, and gasped for air. A girl's voice sounded in his ear, a girl's hand clasped his own;

he looked down to see a slender figure sinking by his side, and quickly, without a second thought, put his arm about her, drawing her in front of him ; —recognising she was for the moment safe from those who were pushing her down in her unresisting weakness. “Courage,” his own voice sounded weak and strange in his ears, and again he staggered and was pushed aside by those still crowding up behind.

“Courage.” At the sound of the voice the woman with the ruddy hair half turned her head, and their eyes had met.

There was a cry which never reached him, for he had slipped and fallen, but his eyes had met hers : she was aware he had seen her, for she attempted to turn towards him. But what was her weak will at such a moment ! She stumbled and fell also. So few the steps between them, but before the distance could be trodden, Death had stepped in, and laid his detaining hand on each.

Frozen into eternal silence was the question on his lips, and the answer that had been hidden in her eyes ; both passionate hearts were stilled, and Death took into his eternal keeping the secret that Life had thought her own.

I N G E L H E I M.



CHAPTER I.

“The destined hand doth strike the fated blow,
Surely the arrow’s fitted to the bow !”

THE rain was coming down in the steady persistent fashion which we are wont to associate with a wet day in England, a cold east wind emphasising the dreariness of all around. The very flowers and leaves, which at the call of May had ventured forth, looked discoloured and shrivelled, and it required all the charm of summer to make Beverley Parsonage bright and attractive, instead of, as it was to-day, an ugly red brick house, with only a small and uninteresting garden and a high wall between it and a smoky mining village.

But Mr Traherne, with his small income and his growing family, did not think much of the east wind and the dismal rain, except to utter a hope that the

young peas would not suffer, or the blossoms on the unhappy-looking fruit-trees be washed away. He was a small, neat-looking man, who wore an expression of being too insignificant for the large events of life to trouble themselves about him, and as if all that was expected of him was to bear minor troubles with equanimity, which probably he did, for there were few lines on his face.

It was getting dark outside as he opened the door of the house ; there was a light already in the room on the right-hand side, whence, as he paused a moment, a voice proceeded, calling him by name—

“ James, James, is that you ? ”

“ Yes, my dear—coming, coming.”

A moment later he had entered a large room, apparently combining the functions of both dining and school room, in which were gathered together a small party.

Mrs Traherne was almost as unremarkable in appearance as her husband, only, whereas he was dark with sallow cheeks and black hair turning grey, she was fair—fair in the colourless way so common in English women, with blond lustreless hair, now thickly sown with grey. Looking at them both in the warm light of the fire, it was impossible to believe that they had ever known the swing of the pendulum which lifts alternately from deepest despair to poise for a moment on breathless heights.

No, life with them had only swayed between momentary anxiety and reasonable comfort, and in

the somewhat monotonous round of daily life at Beverley, and a visit to the seaside every summer, since the presence of children had seemed to necessitate the change, time had ebbed and flowed. Perhaps in all the course of their lives nothing had occurred which had so much ruffled the course of their existence as the declaration of their only son that, having arrived at years of discretion, he had decided against following in his father's footsteps and taking holy orders. They had said all they could, both father and mother, but it had availed little or nothing.

He was not easy to argue with, this son, who, almost before they were aware of the fact, had ceased to be a child, and had become a man with a will of his own. An uncomfortably strong will in his parents' opinion, who judged him in the way elders are wont to judge youngsters whom they find unpersuadable, and whom they are not in the position to coerce.

"Jem is very different to what I was at his age," the parson said, and sighed.

"He has had his own way in small things," the wife replied, "he cannot be expected to give it up in larger."

There was a vague reproach in the words which held a truth, for there never had been a time when this other will had bowed to theirs.

It is unquestionably awkward to find in one's own nest a specimen quite unlike one's self or those

one knows, and therefore, presumably, understands best.

The two girls, who were now thirteen and fourteen, shadowed forth so distinctly what they would be like at thirty and forty — were so like what she herself had been, that it filled Mrs Traherne's heart with maternal pride only to watch the smooth fair heads and girlish faces, which either carried her back to her own past, or held a prophecy of the future, as she felt inclined. It was a language she understood, whereas this other was some strange hieroglyph that neither she nor her husband felt always certain of deciphering.

There is little outward resemblance certainly. Jem Traherne is an incongruous figure when one looks from his slight commonplace parents to the two flaxen-haired daughters, and then to this big broad-shouldered young man.

There was little or no colour in his face—in this he resembled the rest of his family—and his hands were in shape like those of his father, hands of which Mr Traherne was justly proud; but in the one case they were merely well shaped and well cared for, in the other the long fingers bore tokens of careless exposure to sun and wind, and there was nervous energy and character which were wanting in the father's case: but there the likeness, such as it was, ceased, and some far-off forgotten ancestor stepped in, and the result was this tall young man, with the straight eyebrows above quick-

seeing grey eyes, the wave in the brown hair that grew thick above the broad intelligent forehead, the gravity and determination that marked the well-cut mouth. And, in addition to all this, that inconvenient habit of choosing his own way in great things as well as little, listening to no one else, refusing to be a clergyman, when everything pointed to the evident desirability of such a career, and instead, insisting on becoming a mechanical engineer. "If he had chosen one of the other professions, we should have said nothing," Mrs Traherne had complained; "of course it is better for a young man to adopt the life which pleases him, but such a choice has pained us very much."

But his mother's sighs and his father's querulous protests had no effect; perhaps the far-off ancestor whose colouring he had inherited was also answerable for the temperament.

It is often difficult to realise, looking at the blond head and blue eyes of the child, that behind them may be hidden the passionate ill-regulated heart and storm-tossed mind of a dark-eyed, brown-haired mother. How much more difficult when it is some remote ancestor whose personality is called in question, when his very memory has become a legend!

Such a legend there was in Mr Traherne's family, almost forgotten until this revival of it recalled the old story. Some vague memory of just such another broad-shouldered young man, who had refused

to fill the place in life prepared for him, and had renounced his family and his home, and had gone to seek his fortune beyond the seas.

He had never returned, and no official information either as to whether he had prospered or not. His exodus had taken place before the days of regular posts to far-off places, but in his own family his name was treasured as a warning.

It is more agreeable to imagine the disobedient have failed, than to picture them adding success to their other vices.

"I believe he succeeded," Jem said one day, in response to an observation of his mother's, who was holding up the family skeleton as a warning. "I believe he succeeded." He had been younger then, and had not adopted silence as his surest weapon.

"If he had," his mother insisted, "he would have been only too glad to return and say so."

"It is just as likely he was happy, and didn't care whether they knew it or not."

"Not care about his own mother and father," Mrs Traherne cried, seizing on a possible point to be made, in the way people consider fair when arguing with those weaker than themselves. "Oh, Jem, if that is all you gain by getting your own way, it is not likely to do you much good."

What could Jem do but hold his peace for the future. It was better to be thought sullen than called unfilial.

The years had passed since then. Jem had ceased

to be a schoolboy, had had two years of training, and had become a man. He was at home just now on a short holiday, and though his father and mother had ceased to speak, except to each other, of their disappointment, yet there was always a shadow of the old friction remaining.

"He might have been such a comfort to us," they said to each other instead.

It was with a shudder of horror they followed each step in his career, seeing in it only roughened hands and a carelessness of attire, and overlooking the careful persistent work which had pushed him on, until now at two-and-twenty he was earning his own living. A gap of several years was between him and the girls, but it was in them both father and mother centred their hopes and daily interests.

There was a thrill of excitement when Mr Traherne entered the schoolroom: evidently he was expected to bring some news.

"Well?" Mrs Traherne interrogated, and the two girls, interrupted in their lessons, lifted their heads expectantly.

"I have arranged with Simpson to send his fly at half-past six," Mr Traherne replied; "there is no hope of its clearing now, and we can all go in it. It is very roomy, and if Jem sits on the box, there will be plenty of room for the rest of us inside."

At the words, young Traherne laid down his book and made some dissentient observation, but it was at once put aside.

"No, no, Jem," his mother said, "you must go. Miss Russell especially asked you, and I promised."

"There is no difficulty," her husband added, "we can all easily go in the fly. I am sure it will be worth a little trouble."

Jem gave an impatient sigh and returned to his book, heedless of the remarks of those about him.

In the usual regular routine of the Parsonage life, an evening such as this promised to be was an eventful one.

Miss Russell, the hostess, was a lady who lived a mile away from this mining village, and was, in virtue of the wealth which she drew from the mines, of great importance in her neighbourhood.

She was generally esteemed eccentric, chiefly on account of her friends, who had little in the shape of fashion or money as a rule to recommend them, and who caused a gasp of astonishment whenever they appeared.

They were often foreigners, a fact in itself worthy of suspicion, as surely with the county families as with those of the miners, who would stand in their doorways to follow with doubting eyes the bespectacled German professor, or fiercely gesticulating Italian, as he passed down the narrow street.

It was not often her clergyman and his family were included in her invitations; the quarterly dinner and the yearly garden-party generally suf-

ficed, but this evening was a special out-of-the-way affair.

A concert for a local charity was to be held in Beverley Hall. Local talent was chiefly responsible, and the choruses especially were dependent on the singers in the church choir, and amongst these were Martha and Mary Traherne, the clergyman's daughters.

The great night was now close at hand, there was plenty to talk about as the little party sat over the welcome fire on that cold east-windy May evening.

As they talked, the curtains, which had been closed to shut out the dreary evening, were softly withdrawn, and in the narrow aperture appeared a slight figure, a figure strangely at variance with the other occupants of the room. A slight overgrown girl, thin and sallow ; but the dark eyes, though not very large, were well set under black brows, and gave character to the face, the soft wavy hair, black as night, was plaited close about the small head. It was a minute or two before those gathered about the fire became aware of her presence, but a sudden turn brought her into Mr Traherne's vision, and he called to her at once.

"Dolly, where have you appeared from? Come over here to the fire, child. Did you fall asleep behind the curtain," he added, as she approached. "You look as if you were not yet quite wide awake."

Goodness is a queer plant, it grows in such un-

likely out-of-the-way corners, prospers in such unlikely soil.

Mr and Mrs Traherne were to all appearances the most ordinary folk likely to be met with; their virtues were of the homely order, common to thousands of others whose way of life makes no great demands upon their principles; their faults were those of thousands also. Small, little everyday faults, virtues which never seemed to rise above the dead level of the dullest of human lives. A little over-carefulness,—because the day might come when wife and children might be dependent on friends and charity,—a little selfishness, a little petty tyranny; and, on the other side, small kindnesses, an honest, virtuous, if dull life, upon which the full light of day might fall. And, in addition to all this small debit and credit, one great kindness, to which neither man nor wife ever gave a passing thought.

Thirteen years ago, when the struggle of life had been at its hardest, when other little ones had been in the nursery and had filled the gaps between broad-shouldered Jem and the two flaxen-haired girls,—gaps which were marked now by names on one churchyard stone,—coming home one night it had been to find a little dark-eyed child wrapped in a shawl hidden in the shadow of the Parsonage doorway.

No clue to its belongings! and to those who heard of the mysterious baby, there was much to point its advent towards an invasion of gipsies which had taken place lately in the neighbourhood. But gip-

sies had vanished, and whether it was from them she had come or not, the child, a dark-eyed little girl of two years old, remained.

The workhouse. That was the natural home for a nameless little waif, and thither she would have been consigned had the talkers in the neighbourhood had their way.

But the Trahernes, with their dull uninteresting ways, which made them but of small account socially, their petty economies, which they practised with each other's strongest appreciation, were in this matter at once of one accord—that the home of the little child was not with strangers at the workhouse, but with those at whose door she had been left. "One child makes little difference," Mr Traherne said, and Mrs Traherne sighed in answer, and said that there was to spare since those little graves had been dug, and then they opened their arms to the stranger, and what was theirs and their children's became hers also.

The child had been baptised, because, considering the doubts about her parentage, it seemed but too possible that that ceremony had been omitted. Miss Russell, the lady of the Hall, had come forward and offered herself as godmother, and had selected the name—a name at variance with all the parsonage traditions, a name whose significance had had to be explained, Dolores.

Miss Russell was capable, if she chose, to be a valuable friend to the little stranger, so the name

was given as a sacrifice to her peculiarities and foreign ways; but the Trahernes were glad to lend the shelter of their own honest patronymic in addition to the un-English prefix.

There were yet ten minutes to the half-hour when Simpson's fly drove up to the door of Beverley Hall; the rain was still coming heavily down, so that, considering the importance of the occasion, both Mr and Mrs Traherne congratulated themselves on the extravagance. The three girls were silent all the way, though not particularly shy, the unusualness of the proceeding was perhaps a little awe-inspiring. There was even a little nervous suggestiveness in the constant talk of the parents. But, once arrived, every personal feeling was swallowed up in the importance of the occasion, the consideration of those others who were to take part in the proceedings.

After a careful maternal examination, Mrs Traherne had to take her departure, leaving the girls in the room set apart for the performers, whilst she joined her husband and son, who had steadily refused to do more than lend his countenance to the proceedings. To sing a comic song, as had been suggested, or even to join the chorus, did not come within his idea of what could reasonably be expected of him. So with his father and mother he went to the concert-room to swell the audience.

Here there was much flutter and stir and low-voiced talk. The proceedings were unusual, and the

neighbours from far and near had come to criticise the latest eccentricity at Beverley Hall.

A bazaar was the orthodox way of raising money, and amongst those gathered together, there was a little uncertainty whether the novelty,—which in itself was an attraction—a concert was quite a legitimate proceeding. The undercurrent of doubt and thought, of which she was well aware, did not trouble Miss Russell however.

She was a tall handsome woman of forty, and her position—that of a lady living alone, with freedom to ask to her house any one she chose—was now accepted: after all, though handsome and brilliant, she had reached the age when a little liberty in action may be allowed. But it was not quite forgotten that she had done much the same when she was a handsome girl of twenty-three, and had found herself mistress of Beverley. She should have married then, and chosen a man suitable for the position, instead——

Well, instead, here she was to-day in her rich attire, just as regardless of the voices of her neighbours as she had been in those old times.

Her hair, which was quite white, was arranged in becoming twists and curls, her manner and voice were a little quick and decided, those of a woman who is accustomed to being listened to, the expression perhaps a shade hard, a trifle careless also about the conventional courtesy which listens to the tedious and bears with the dull; but a clever

woman, free from the ordinary restrictions of womanhood, free also from the softening influence of wife and motherhood, is apt to become slightly overbearing, and the fact is just as often accepted as rebelled against by those among whom her lot is cast.

She was in her element to-night; proud of the energy which had brought this novelty to a successful issue, for the talent she had got together was of no mean order; and, as enthusiasm increased, there was a feeling of successful generalship in a difficult campaign, which added zest to her enjoyment.

“Who is the black child?”

The question broke in upon a murmured conversation she was holding in the far background.

The speaker was one of those stout elderly foreigners, with unkempt heads and gleaming spectacles, of whom the neighbourhood disapproved.

“Black child?” Miss Russell repeated.

“There, there, look!” The voice was excited. Miss Russell followed his pointing hand,—“That black little girl—a crow among pigeons.”

With this apt illustration to guide, it was easy to recognise Dolores, a little Traherne on either side, moving away with the other chorus singers.

“That is my godchild, Professor. She is the little foundling of whom I spoke. When I am quite old and tired of everything else, I am going to bring her here to comfort my old age.”

"You shall not, you shall not. You shall give her to me."

"Yes?" Miss Russell interrogated. "She is not mine to give, so my 'yes' is only a question, which means, and what will you do with her?"

"I will make her into a singer, if I am not mistaken."

"You are never mistaken."

The old man looked gratified at the compliment.

"We will hear her alone?" he questioned.

Miss Russell nodded. She was interested also and silenced. Dolores was standing by the piano on the little stage in front.

A common enough ballad; very little style to the critical ears of the woman who had listened to the best music of her time, but the voice, or the promise of it, was there. Full and true and sweet, it filled the room with the clearness of a bird's song, and was appreciated by the applause it received.

Awkward enough she looked as she stood by the piano, blushing and paling in response to the applause, until the accompanist, a fashionable young Londoner, pitying her evident discomfiture, rose and, taking her hand, led her away.

"Yes, I am right, I am sure of it," the old German murmured. "You must give her to me, Miss Russell. It is there, she must be taught. And a founding you say?"

"Ah, but, Herr Laurentius, you are going too fast: she is not mine to give, as I told you before. She

has a home, though it is possible her adopted parents may give her up."

"What makes you think so?"

She had forgotten as she spoke, her voice a little raised now under cover of the conversation that followed the song, that this young man seated so near would be likely to take any interest in her words.

"Mr Traherne," she said, for a moment disconcerted. "Ah, now, Professor, I will introduce you to the brother by adoption, and you can hear first-hand what I can only repeat. Mr Traherne," she added, "has chosen and followed his own way in life, so will probably sympathise with others who do the same."

This last shaft, as she hurried away, was possibly a swift feminine idea of carrying the war into the enemy's country; but the German was too much pre-occupied to heed it—his one idea was to gather from this grave young man as much of Dolores' past as possible, so as to realise how best to accomplish his own wishes.

He did not learn much however. Jem Traherne was not communicative, and the chief thing to be gained from him was the presentation to his father.

The young man's words were few and all to the point: that the girl had a home—that the word foundling annoyed him—that she was as much part of his home as his sisters were. That women were best under the care of those who loved them, and

that as long as his father was alive, three daughters were as easy to guard and provide for as two.

“And afterwards?” questioned his listener.

There was a shade of annoyance in Jem’s face: the question disconcerted him, though he answered at once. “It will be a long time, I trust,” he began gravely.

“I trust so also,” Herr Laurentius replied. “But you are providing for your future, so at least I am told, is it not as well to let her provide for hers?”

“Hers will be assured.”

The voice was low, but its full import did not escape his listener, nor the look that accompanied it. It told to the older man all the hopes which the speaker cherished, what the future would be into which this black-eyed child would drift, if she were left in ignorance of the possibilities life held for her.

And the younger man felt only a momentary fear that in some unguarded word his secret might escape him, a secret which a look had sufficed to place in the other’s keeping. A momentary jealous terror, in which he saw this future for which he was working torn away from him—the little dark-eyed girl no longer a safely guarded treasure in his home awaiting the hour when he should be free to claim her, but a successful artist, having learnt so much that it would be impossible to retrace the steps which led back to his side, steps so easily trodden when they led away.

The introduction to Mr Traherne seemed to offer more hope for the future. He was fond of the girl; indeed the question no more presented itself under the guise of a question than would have been the case about his own daughters, but when the German touched upon her future it opened out before him the knowledge that it was as well to consider what might arrive. He was a comparatively young man, but death was uncertain, and there would be but small means to divide amongst wife and daughters. It would not be right to overlook any means of provision. He would think it over, would talk it over with Mrs Traherne, and let the Professor know at what conclusion they should arrive.

When the children were safe in bed that night, he laid the matter before his wife, perhaps unconsciously lending a tone of decision to his words which had not been there when he first considered the matter, but which had formulated as later reasons had driven out previous uncertainties.

And his wife accepted the later tone, as it was her way to do. The want of reasoning powers in a woman have often been commented upon. Why does not a man more often profit by the fact, and not bring forward his wishes till he has studied the reasons with which they can be recommended?

It leaves no opportunity then for the sharp tongue to expose the weakness of the armour, and sharp tongues are oftenest the exception. The rule in wifehood is certainly to be an Echo—better of course

than a Contradiction, if it has to abide under the same roof.

So when the little party met at breakfast it was to see in each other's faces, hear in each other's words, the advantages of the German's offer—should he prove of the same mind and repeat the words that had seemed almost a promise, the previous night. Excepting by Jem, whose silence might have been disapproval, or perhaps only habit, the future was viewed in sunshine.

"Perhaps we were unwise to mention it before the girls," Mr Traherne said later, "until we see whether anything is really to come of it—it would be disappointing if it was only a passing idea."

But this temporary shadow was swept away very shortly by the arrival of a servant with a note, asking Mrs Traherne to send Dolores back with the servant.

"Which means of course," she decided, "that there *is* something in it. Put on your best frock, Dolly, and come to me that I may see that you are all right before you start. And try and remember, dear," she added impressively, as she saw the girl off, "how very much depends on your behaviour."

It was a nervous parting word, but Dolores was not abashed by it. Life at the Parsonage flowed in such a placid current, that any little change from the daily routine was acceptable.

So Dolores trotted along the wet lanes by the side of Miss Russell's maid, in a delightful flutter of

mingled joy and fear. It may be fairly doubted if Elinor Russell had ever given a moment's thought to her godchild, except when they stood face to face, since the moment when she had held her in her arms at the font.

Her life was a brilliant and exciting one, and it was intellectually that she was most in accord with the rest of the world.

It was as lady of the manor, not as a pitiful woman, that she had accepted so much responsibility in little Dolores' fate, and it was with quite a different feeling she had thought of her, with quite a different feeling she met her, since that conversation she had held with Herr Laurentius the previous night.

The slight sallow girl, who was considered at a disadvantage at the Parsonage when compared with the two fair daughters of the house, judged by her more experienced standard, held possibilities of future good looks which her companions did not possess.

"She is awkward and unformed," passing the girl in swift review, "but she will improve. She has a pretty head and good eyes."

"Oh yes, granted the voice of which Herr Laurentius seems so sure, she will be quite good-looking enough. I almost wish I had adopted her to interest my middle life, instead of reserving her for my old age."

She drew the child nearer to her, bidding her sit

down, and then proceeded to explain in full the scheme which had now acquired perfection in detail.

The Professor, she explained, would take her to Ingelheim, and in the household of some friends of his, Dolores would continue her education, giving her whole soul and time and energy to music.

"They are people who will be very kind to you. The man is a musician, and is attached to the Court, chiefly in the way of providing for its amusements; his daughter is very sweet, and will be a companion for you, though she is older—correct me, Professor, if I am giving wrong facts—and you will live there and be very happy, Dolores, will you not? and you will become a great singer and be a success,—that is what we all want to be, you know, and we can't."

She paused, and took the girl's hand in hers.

"Now, Dolores, tell me what you think."

"If I go, for how long will it be? and if I do not sing as well as the Professor hopes, what will become of me then?"

Though she spoke quietly, there was a little tremble in the slender hand, of which Miss Russell was aware.

"Yes, Professor," she said, turning to Herr Laurentius, "Dolores is right; we must understand everything. Supposing she fails, what is to become of her then?"

She will not fail." He spoke defiantly. "She will do what I wish, and she will succeed."

"But if not," Miss Russell persisted, "then she must return home. She will be none the worse for being educated."

"But I have no home."

The girl looked from one to the other, and under the look the four eyes drooped a little; but in a moment the Professor had recovered, crossed the room, and sat down beside Miss Russell.

"We will not contemplate failure," he said more quietly, "but the child is right: it will not do to take her away from those who have been kind to her, unless her future in any case is assured."

"It is assured," Miss Russell answered quickly, lifting her eyes; "if you do not accomplish what you hope, she shall have a home with me. It would not be fair, of course, to expect the Trahernes to give her up for our whims, and then take her back."

"Perhaps I could teach music then, if I could not sing."

"Yes, we will see to that if we fail in the other. But now, take off your hat, child, and stand up and let me hear you."

"She will do," he said, half an hour later; "with the training that I can promise her, she will do."

"And you are sure of your friends? The child must have a happy home."

"Yes, I promise that, and I shall myself see her at intervals."

"And you, Dolores," turning to the girl herself;

"are you glad or sorry to think of going out into the world?"

"I know them all at the Parsonage,"—her voice faltered a little,—“they have been very kind to me; it is giving up so much——”

"So much," repeated Miss Russell. There was infinite expression in the two words. "Why, my dear child, you are not giving up; you are being helped out of a narrow dreary round of dulness into all the brightness there is in the world."

"But if I don't like the world, or it does not like me, I have lost this just the same."

"Experience, my dear, is always a gain, even if it serves only to show you the value of things by comparison."

If she were not satisfied, she did not say so. Very few people argued with Miss Russell. There was no many-sidedness to her character, which might have helped her to understand through sympathy the point of view of another.

A strong dominant will, which knew what it desired, and seized and enjoyed it, had led her through all the difficulties of a very difficult position to the place where she now stood—a place where she was free to do as she liked, and to be careless of the laws which governed the rest of womankind. She had made her own laws, governed her life by them, and, what was more extraordinary, had reached that point where others judged her by those self-established laws; but perhaps all these facts had in

a way helped to deprive her of the quick sympathy which is so often a woman's heritage—for every gain there is a corresponding loss. Dolores' future opened out a possible vista of interest and pleasure; at any cost, it must now be worked out. To those whose minds admit of weighing and judging facts, the *pros* and *cons* are occasionally so evenly balanced that the nice adjustment of the weights is not easy: to Miss Russell no such difficulties arose. "Give up!" What was there to give up?—the gain was the point of consideration. But the actual measurable risk must be considered and prepared against. And so, when all was finally decided, Elinor Russell came forward, in what Mr Traherne and his wife considered a most generous manner, and said that she would allow her godchild £50 a-year during the term of her tuition, so that she might be independent; and that afterwards, should the Professor prove to have been mistaken, or should her health break down, or any unforeseen calamity arise, making it impossible for her to succeed in her career, that she, Elinor Russell, would provide her with her home.

There was no apparent flaw, and yet when Dolores found herself once more at the Parsonage with dull uninteresting Mr and Mrs Traherne, she felt the tears welling into her eyes at the thought that the days were numbered in which they were to be a part of her everyday life; and at night she stole from her bed to kiss once more the flaxen-haired

sisters in the next room, with whom she had lived so long, and who yet were separated from her by a gulf so wide that the day might easily come in which there would be no way of recrossing it.

Sisters may be parted by the breadth of continents, or the wider barrier of years of separation, but yet there is always a means of meeting: there are the thousand connecting-links of one father, one mother, one common home; but for her, nameless Dolores, all the past might be swept away, and she would have no right to recall it, no sacred talisman wherewith to conjure it up. These were new thoughts, but they had forced their way in, and taken up their abode, and now in the short space of twenty-four hours they were in seeming the companions of a lifetime.

CHAPTER II.

“A brave, able, self-respecting manhood is fair profit for any man’s first thirty years of life.”

BUT smoothly as everything seemed to go, all possible difficulties overruled by the Professor’s enthusiasm and Miss Russell’s strong will, yet was there one element in their midst which had as yet been overlooked.

The Professor—perhaps the keenest-eyed of all—had recognised the disapproval that the scheme would meet with from Jem Traherne; but he had also recognised in addition that his position rendered him incapable of doing more than disapprove, that prevention was out of the question, and further, that this was not a man who would waste words over what he could not help.

Herr Laurentius was sentimental in his way, and with one side of his stout nature he gave a sigh to the young man’s hopes, which he recognised were likely now never to reach fulfilment; with the other, he rejoiced that his good luck had brought him here just in time to prevent the young man attaining his

wish, and by doing so deprive him, Ludwig Laurentius, of the chance of future fame that was now dazzling his vision.

Miss Russell was not a woman to take into consideration wills which ran counter to her own, especially when circumstances favoured her and put the winning cards into her hand; neither was she sufficiently keen of perception to imagine that there was likely to be serious disapproval. Whenever the thought of Jem came across her, it was with a vague sense of admiration for a will strong enough to have made its own way against such difficult and adverse circumstances. But the thought did not often come—he was no real power in her life; until this question of Dolores' future arose, he was scarcely less shadowy than the rest of his family. If she had known and realised, she still would not have sympathised; at any rate she would have gone her own way just the same, but she would have admired—honestly admired—the strength of character which was capable of at once deciding where action would be futile, and quietly accepting the inevitable.

In similar circumstances she would have shrugged her shoulders and said, There is no use fighting against fate, but fate means so many things. And fights, with strength and beauty and fortune and talent on one side, and fate on the other, are more apt to be successful than those in which all the disadvantages of life are called into the battle-field.

Even fate seems to recognise the uselessness of a fight with so much of which the world approves.

And this—though perhaps not in these words—Jem knew, and when he learnt that everything was decided, that Dolores would soon cease to be the inmate of the home where she had now lived for thirteen years, he bowed to the inevitable, for so the present seemed; but it was with the passionate strength of a silent nature, which finds no relief in vain words, and cannot understand the solace of vain action.

The afternoon was wet and cold; east winds had invested this May with little promise of spring, and after a silent gloomy luncheon, he put on his hat, regardless of the rain, which was still falling, and started, scarce caring whither, for a walk, which led him, before he was well aware of it, many miles from home—far beyond the region of smoke and the necessarily dreary surroundings of a mining village, into the stretch of country that lay beyond. A country dull and depressing now, under the combined influences of rain and east wind, but which yet was country—trees with the fresh green of early spring, scentless violets among the ferns by the roadside. It was already late when he paused in his rapid walk and looked around to realise how far he was from home, and that there was nothing to do but, wet as he was, to return the way he had come, a dismal prospect, as it was already twilight.

But despite the walk, he had not arrived at any

clear decision as to what he should do, or indeed whether there were anything to be done. It was exasperating to feel that with all the strength which he had already tried and proved, that in this matter, on which it seemed so much depended, he could do nothing.

The girl herself was too young — he was certain no thought of a personal future had as yet dawned — and now this prospect of brilliant success would take the place of that other happy life which he had hoped would have gradually opened out, and charmed her into safety and love.

To speak too soon would be unwise — love's delicate blossom must form in nature's own tender careful way ; man's rough hand attempting to open it too soon, is likely to prove a dismal failure : he knew this, felt it, whenever he was with the girl, whose dark eyes looked at him with the tender affection of a sister, whose kiss he had known night and morning every since her babyhood. A word, a careless look or touch, might banish all that and give instead — everything or nothing ; the better part seemed to be to say nothing, and let her drift away into the silence of separation, and leave the necessary future awakening to other circumstances — perhaps to some other man.

Little to be wondered at was it then, that when late at night he arrived at the door of the Parsonage, wet, and wearied alike in mind and body, the sight of him caused expressions of wonder.

“Where have you been, Jem?” His mother’s voice was feebly anxious, his father’s feebly irritated.

“Had no dinner? Why, it is nine o’clock, where have you been? I thought, of course, you were dining somewhere.”

But when she realised how wet he was, and that he was feverish in addition, all the little vexation was laid aside, and Mrs Traherne began suggesting remedies. The care was almost more unbearable, Jem felt, under existing circumstances, than the previous irritation; but he accepted the suggestion of going to bed, and trying if a hot drink would stop an incipient cold—at least it would ensure solitude. With his door locked, he could continue the train of thought, and try to arrive at some wise solution of the problem. But first, whilst his mother was fussing about, giving kindly directions for his comfort, he stole down-stairs again and opened the sitting-room door with no especial intention, but yet he was disappointed when he saw his sisters were the only occupants.

“Where is Dolly?”

“She has gone to bed, I think,” Mary answered, lifting her head for a moment from a massive piece of woolwork. “But——”

“No,” her sister interposed, “she is copying a sermon for papa—at least she was a minute ago. Do you want her? Shall I call her?”

They were good amiable girls, and were always

willing to do their brother's behest, provided there seemed to be no particular reason why they should not. They had considered, not without horror, the decision which had cut him adrift from ordained authority, and had placed him in a new position; but that position attained—constituted authority conquered as it were—they were now quite ready to accept the self-appointed government. There will always be found those ready to fear every rebellion, whether for good or evil, but quite ready to accept successful rebellion as the new king.

For a moment he hesitated, as if inclined to accept his sister's suggestion, but if he did, in his present state of mind, what was there to say, and, "No, thanks," he said briefly, turning away; but it was across the narrow hall he slowly walked, not upstairs, and before he had given it another thought, he had opened the little study door opposite, and was standing in the small room, where, by the light of one candle, Dolores sat at a much ink-spotted table, copying a sermon on to pages of imposing size.

"Jem?" She lifted her eyes at the opening door, and smiled in ready welcome. For a moment he had nothing to say, all his previous doubts crowding in upon him, then he was speaking. "Dolly, is it your own wish to go to Ingelheim? Have you really considered the matter? Are you not happy here?" speaking more excitedly. "Why do you wish to leave your home?"

Having spoken, it seemed to him that he had said the very words he had determined to leave unsaid, and he looked nervously for a counterbalancing excitement, but there was none. Tears came into the girl's eyes, she dropped her pen and rose from her place, laying her hand on his rough wet coat.

"Ah, Jem, do you not know how unhappy it makes me to leave you all? But it would not be right not to accept such an offer. It is always possible that I may succeed. They say so."

"But if you don't? You are giving up so much for a chance."

"I should have to give it up sooner or later."

"Why, why? Women should be content to stay at home."

Then, with a little conscious pride in the memory of how he had fought his own battle, "With men it is different: it is their duty to go abroad. Women should leave the rough work to them."

"But, Jem," she spoke timidly, and her hand clasped his coat-sleeve tighter, "for me it is different. That is all very well for other women."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, you know, I have no home, no one to work for me. I must work for myself, and the sooner I begin the better."

They were both a little old-fashioned in their ideas. To Dolores, the idea had never come that there was any loss of dignity involved in the thought of dependence. It was the lot of women to be de-

pendent on some one—unless they chanced to be in her own unhappy position, when there was no choice but to fight the world on her own account.

To Jem, it was right that so it should be. Men were given health and strength to prepare homes and ease for those they loved—to him it was almost a law of nature that so it should be. The ideas of the modern world on such a subject had not penetrated the four walls of Beverley Parsonage.

“This is your home,” he said, sturdily, but with a certain rough tenderness, “if you are content to stay here—and wait,” he added, more slowly. “By-and-by, when I have done a little more, and am freer, I shall make a home for you.”

“But, Jem”—there was still a tremor in her voice, which responded in part to his kindness—“you are, after all, not a brother. Cannot you see that a day will come when this will be no home for me. If I have indeed the capacity for earning my livelihood, I must make what use I can of it.”

He heard her in silence, because all the time she was speaking he was still weighing the previous doubts; but when he looked down into the clear eyes, the slight hand on his arm, he hesitated again. No, he would wait. Though that involved letting her go. What could he, indeed, advance against it?

“I shall go out at Christmas,” he said, when he spoke next, “and see for myself that you are happy and well cared for, and content to continue. You

promise me that when I go you will tell me the truth?"

That seemed easy enough—the girl promised.

"And you must write to me—I mean letters to my address—and in them you must tell me exactly what you do, and whether they are kind to you. If you are not happy"—he had turned away, but as he said those words he came back to her side—"you will tell me, and I will see that you come back."

"Dear Jem"—she stroked his hand gently: kind as he always had been, he was by habit so silent that this expression of his goodwill and care of her seemed strange—"you need not fear for me; I will write and tell you everything, just as if you were in truth the brother that you have always been."

It was not much, but it was a safe foundation, Jem in his ignorance of life imagined. "It will be easy," he thought, as, cold and wet, he made his way up-stairs, "to slip from the one love into the other. By-and-by, when she is a little older, she will notice the difference, and take the further step. In the meantime I can wait and work."

CHAPTER III.

“ Reaching forth from the tangible blossoms,
Reaching far for impossible things.”

NEVER in later life is it possible for any step—lead where it will—to appear as important as that first one which leads from the calm organised everyday life known from childhood into the world that lies beyond that secure anchorage. How much greater is the difference when it involves leaving a quiet English village and waking up in an unknown German town, whose quiet dreamy inactivity seemed to the country girl a very vortex of gaiety—a town where novelty and sunshine and strange foreign tongues emphasised at every turn the vast gap between now and then ! Though Dolores had regretted a little at first the accustomed home, there was so much that was novel, the novelty in itself proving an opiate, that youth soon ceased to mourn, and was ready to be happy in what it had attained, laying aside as much as possible the thought of the price paid. The price is light until some moment teaches, probably

unwittingly, that it means that there is no going back. For so long are we lured with the phantasmal hope, that if we do not like this, we will return to that.

The home of which the Professor had spoken, the home to which he himself had brought her, was French—a French father and daughter; but their lives, their thoughts, their business, were cast among Germans, and the French tongue was only heard in the rare intervals when the two found themselves alone.

To Dolores, on the night when she arrived, tired and home-sick, and nervous in the presence of the Professor, whose silences and furious bursts of talk were alike terrifying, there was something home-like at once in the sight of the quiet gentle-mannered woman who came to meet her, who kissed her, and spoke to her in English—foreign English, it is true, but quite intelligible—and who took her at once to a prettily furnished room, and after a little kindly talk prescribed supper and bed.

“You are too tired to come down-stairs, Dolores,—is that your name? it is very pretty, though rather sad,—are you not? I will come back to you when you are in bed; in the meantime I must go and make sure that my father and the Professor have what they need. They will talk, talk all night, and when they get excited you will hear them, because their voices are rather loud. But no one minds: they are friends, though they quarrel so much.”

She smiled a little; but it was the grave quiet smile of one to whom laughter was strange, and Dolores felt a thrill of confidence in this other girl so little older than herself, perhaps not more than five or six years, and threw her arms about her in an unaccustomed tenderness, born of her own loneliness. "You will be like a little sister for me, Dolores; I am so much alone." She blushed a little, a very faint colour which came and went directly under her clear skin. "My name is Emilie," she added, as if seeking some words to finish her sentence. She was not pretty, only gentle and intelligent-looking. The hair that waved naturally, and the perfect oval of her face, were her only claims to the beauty which, until you analysed the features, you felt must be there; but to those who knew her well, to whom the intelligence and the gentleness appealed, there was a beauty unapparent to the less discerning.

Now, in these four months in which Dolores had lived with her, there had sprung up between the two an intimacy which it seemed to her was closer, more tender than that which had been the result of all those years at Beverley. She blamed herself slightly, recognising the immense debt she owed to those who had had pity on her deserted babyhood. If they had not, if—as might so easily have been the case—a workhouse had been her home, what would her life have been now!

She was not very imaginative, she did not see the

Traherne through brilliant-tinted glasses; but she acknowledged in her heart the debt she owed, and put aside as much as possible any thought of their shortcomings. She had had of their best; to be critical because it seemed as if there were a better than their best, would have been a despising of the widow's mite in her estimation. The wider horizon had granted a facility for comparison of which she had previously been incapable; but to a right judgment degrees of comparison are only degrees—the better does not obliterate the good.

She had grown older in the time; the companionship of a woman older than herself had matured her, perhaps the abrupt alteration of surrounding conditions, the unaccustomed responsibility, had also had somewhat to say to the ripening of her character. Besides, every month, when childhood is over, tends as surely towards womanhood as an opening leaf or expanding bud to its summer perfection, when once the touch of spring has been laid upon the land.

Her life, too, was very fully occupied; her musical education of itself demanded for theory and practice the better part of the day, and in addition her general education was not neglected. French and German were easy to acquire under present circumstances, and her future career demanded a knowledge of Italian. So with all this work and the preparation it demanded, there was not much time except for necessary fresh air.

The pretty house in which the Desprez lived was separated by a narrow, scarcely frequented road, from a high dead wall, above which waved the branches of tall trees, and through an iron open-worked door were glimpses of a far-reaching park, ending in a dim vista of the spray of fountains and bright gleams of flowers.

This precinct was the park in which was hidden the Palace of Ingelheim. To this little gate M. Desprez held a private key, which admitted him to a speedy and privileged entrance to the Court theatre, at which most of his now world-wide music had made its first appearance.

His jovial, beaming, well-contented face and burly figure were as well known in Ingelheim as those of the little Prince or his beautiful mother, and on his morning walks there were almost as many hats raised to him as to the dwellers in the Palace.

His cheerful *bonhomie* had warmed the heart of Dolores towards him. The lessons she had feared had become a delight: his words were always encouraging, his smiling good-humour saw the whole world through bright glasses. Failure! such a word was not in his dictionary. "Look at me," was the unspoken text of his sermon—"look what I have done! you must not fail; copy me, be a success."

By success he meant the well-earned plaudits of the multitude for the man who had honestly striven to please them; but sometimes it entered vaguely into Dolores' head to wonder if those

plaudits were really the best test—if, for instance, M. Desprez even would not have done better work had he not considered them the test? But it was a difficult question to answer, and a perplexing question to one who had never known success or failure, nothing but dead level mediocrity, until now.

It was most often in Emilie's company that she took her daily walks; but to-day it was alone she had turned the key and had entered into the secluded park.

The Palace was shut up at present, and during the summer months of solitude the privilege of entrance by the small gate was extended to the members of M. Desprez' family.

There was a prophecy of autumn in the air, a tinge of yellow over the trees in the park: it would take but a little more to banish summer memories. Dolores wandered on, until of a sudden a turn in the road brought her from the smooth turf and great trees of the park to the garden immediately around the Palace, to a large lake on which swans floated, brooding whitely above their white reflections, water-plants above its placid waters, white marble steps leading down into its still depths. Here she paused, pleased unknowingly with the quiet and beauty of the place, over which the soft veil of a still autumn evening was settling.

As she stood thus, a man appeared in the path she had quitted; his head was bent as if in thought, his tall slight figure stooped a little as he leaned some-

what on his stick, as if its support were grateful. It was somewhat of a surprise, when he lifted his head as he approached the lake, to discover that the face was young and the eyes bright—they were out of keeping with the figure, which might have belonged to a much older man. He raised his hat when he saw the girl, and moved directly to her side.

She knew him well, though she had not often spoken to him. He was one of those pupils for whom Charles Desprez had prophesied early brilliant success, and who had reached the age of seven-and-twenty, prematurely aged by reason of ill health, without one laurel-leaf plucked of all the many that were to have formed his chaplet. At seven-and-twenty to be a poor musician, teaching for his daily bread, was a form of failure that to M. Desprez was not pitiable, but despicable. "And he has it in him," he had said many times, "I am never mistaken. If he had chosen, he might have done as I have done." It was certainly a very different result—if this were result—but we are so apt, in ill-judged haste, to decide that that which is not evident to our coarser senses does not exist. Nature works in so many ways, keeping her end ever in view. The blossoming of an aloe, we are told, takes a hundred years. To those who saw it in its youth, the promise of its flowering seemed a far-off impossible dream, but at the flowering who would be found to grudge the years of patient waiting.

"And how does the voice get on?" he questioned. "Desprez is satisfied; you are going to do him credit, I hope?"

"It will be a serious matter if I fail," she replied, her mind reverting to all she had heard on the subject.

"Let it be true success," the man said, "and then you will have nothing to fear, whatever the result may be."

"What do you mean?" she questioned, coming a step nearer. They were standing together now by the marble steps that led, white and gleaming, down into the waters of the lake, and it was into their depths he looked as he answered.

"True success is the best of which we are capable; if we are conscious of having striven for that, it does not really matter if the world is dissatisfied."

"It ought not to matter, perhaps," she persisted, "but it does."

He lifted his eyes then and looked into hers.

"No, no," he said, "it does not. You are too young yet even to judge of what is success and what is failure; but when the time to understand and to choose has come, take care you choose aright."

"But if every one praises and admires," her thoughts were still running in the same groove as before she met him, "don't you think other people must be able to judge?"

"Other people," he answered, gently, "do not know of what we are capable; but we know, or

should know, if we were not afraid of trying ourselves by the one great unfailing test."

"Yes?" she said questioningly, as he paused.

"Truth. Take that torch into your own heart and light up its dark corners, and it will show you more than the world will ever do. But then," he added in lighter tones, "you must be content if people call you a failure. We have only one life, you see, in which to work, and Truth is often the result of many lives."

After he had spoken there was silence, and when it was broken it was by the man: the girl was still trying to piece together his words, and fit them in to her new experience of life.

"This is a favourite walk of yours, is it not?"

"Yes, we—that is, Miss Desprez and I—often come here; generally in the early morning, before my lessons begin: to-day I have had a holiday, M. Desprez has been away all day."

"You must make the most of your time, for I suppose another month will see the Court re-established and the theatre reopened. That will mean banishment from here, I suppose."

"Yes, I suppose so."

"Well, you are here by right: I am not, or only by such right as an obliging gardener can grant; but, after all, once inside on any terms, it is all one's own. Do you know the saying, 'That which we do not understand, we do not possess'?" And, as she shook her head doubtingly, "The best part of every-

thing is owned by him who sees and appreciates. It is better to look at a fine picture with an appreciative eye, and recognise its beauties, than to possess so many yards of canvas, whose chief value is the money you have paid for them. I love this garden and these beautiful trees; I know them by dawn, and at eventide, and in the mystery of moonlight, and their beauty is my possession."

It was more to himself now than to the girl he was speaking, but, as if aware of the fact, he added, "Perhaps some night when I am strolling about in the shadows of the trees, I may see the 'Grey Lady'—she is said, like myself, to haunt the gardens. Do you know her story?"

"No—tell it me," Dolores said, and she looked up with interest.

The light was fading now, but they were scarcely aware of it, as they stood thus together, the girl awaiting the promised story, the man weaving in the legend into all the surroundings,—the sad half lights, the yellowing foliage, gently approaching winter.

"It is not much of a story," he said; "but there is a legend that when evil threatens the house of Ingelheim, the 'Grey Lady' walks. She only appears in moonlight, and she is all grey, and veiled from head to foot, but sometimes she lifts her veil, and if her face is seen by one of her race, woe to that man or woman. They are doomed to unhappy love. Is not that a romantic story?"

“Yes.” Dolores did not smile; she was on the hither side of the stream, and the indefinite future, with its possible good or evil, was sufficiently far off to be impersonal. That others should suffer or have suffered was likely enough—that she herself should do so was unrealisable. It was interesting to learn of pain that was too vague to cast a shadow.

“Is there anything known about her?” she asked.

“Yes, there is a story,”—he looked into the girl’s face again as he spoke, as if to remind himself that it was to a listener he was speaking, not merely, as usual, thinking the dreamy thoughts habitual to his evening walk,—“but it does not tell us who the ‘Grey Lady’ was; about her there is only a faint legend that she was a captive brought from some far-off foreign land, and that she paced these gardens, and died here of a broken heart, when she found she was no longer dear to him who had brought her hither—that a wife had stolen her place in her captor’s heart; but the story which gives significance to the legend of the ‘Grey Lady’ is of later date. In this palace lived a young prince and princess, and about the Court was a lovely girl—you see it was a common enough story—the prince loved the girl,—what mattered it for the wife? Love had had little part in the marriage; she had her little son, her fine house and gardens, she must be content. But she, poor soul, she loved him, you see, and divined immediately what stood between them.

“‘The “Grey Lady” walks,’ the people said with

hushed breath, because to see her boded evil to the house of Ingelheim, so it were as well to say little—and no one guessed that the slender form that crossed the moonlit terraces and stole through the shadowy trees bore under her filmy veil a passionate, beating human heart. It was safe to haunt the dark silent grounds and the lonely gardens in such a garb, and so both prince and lady knew.

“But the crisis came. The princess—Why,” breaking off abruptly, “why is it, do you think, that every one is so anxious to make sure, when the certainty means pain, and in the doubt there is hope? You do not know,” as the girl shook her head—“of course not. Well, the princess was like the rest of the world, ‘I doubt, break heart, but let me know;’ and so one night, when she fancied in the quiet dusk she had seen the figure of the prince disappear in the shade of the trees, she determined to follow and know her fate, find out who it was that stood between them.

“‘The “Grey Lady” walks.’ The rumour had reached her also. Enveloped from head to foot in the filmy veil that had shrouded her at the altar, she would be safe from curious eyes, safe from questioning voices. Under its sheltering guise, when all the house was hushed in sleep, she stole through the heavy-scented flowers and dark shadows and the silver moonlight until the waters of the lake were reached, where the swans slept then as now, the lilies swayed upon its surface, and from whence were visible the outlines

of a house, now fallen into ruins, which she fancied might be the spot towards which the prince's steps were directed.

"By the lake she paused under her sheltering veil, and as she stood, close beside her, separated from her but by a few steps, there appeared a tall shadow in the moonlight. Picture it."

His eyes were no longer dreamy. They flashed with eagerness, as in the swift waning light he looked at his companion.

"What a situation! Both of them with such wild passions warring in their hearts, both chilled by the sudden terror that in the other they saw her whom they were both alike personating. Here they stood as we stand now, the trees casting dark shadows in the brilliant moonlight, close together, two poor, passionate, broken-hearted women, simulating passionless calm, with the quiet waters at their feet, the marble steps gleaming as to-day, the sleeping swans, and over all the mystic moonlight," with a swift comprehensive gesture. "Cannot you see it, hear it all? I do. It is of that I dream most often when I stand here. One interprets others' sorrows by one's own."

"What did she do?" questioned Dolores, as the man paused, "tell me."

"Ah, there was no choice for her. She loved, you see; she had but one thought, because the memory of the legend was full upon her. She moved swiftly back, hiding her eyes, striving not to look; but one

clear thought through all her terror. 'I will not see your face,' she cried, 'it brings an unhappy end to love!' But even as she spoke, the other woman spoke also, though there was a tremor in her voice. 'I do not fear you. You can bring no evil to me; unveil if you will, I am not of your race. The curse will not fall on me.'

"What happened next — who can tell! Perhaps under her veil the princess saw, not the white ghostly features she had feared, but rich, warm, living flesh and blood, flashing black eyes she had known, a slender lovely figure she had often seen. Perhaps the girl caught some glimpse which told her by whose side she stood, and the sudden movement she made was to escape, or fly towards him who was even now drawing near. But before he had reached her side, there was a slip, a cry, and the waters had closed above her, and husband and wife stood face to face in the chill night, with no slender veiled woman between them."

"Ah!" the girl sighed, "that was best — best, I mean, that she should die then. She did die?"

"Yes, though the man did what he could she was dead, but was it better for her to die? If a victim was necessary, would it not have been better to take the other. It is a problem, an unanswerable one, but I often think it over as I walk here. Why do you say at once, it was best as it was?"

"She was the one in the wrong," the girl an-

swered, "even if she were happy then, it could not have lasted."

"Right? wrong? Those are great questions to decide in a hurry."

"The other was his wife," Dolores insisted. "It was to her he owed his duty, he had no choice."

"You are young; you only see a question from the front, you cannot walk round it yet. Think of another side. Afterwards the husband and wife alive always together, at least one roof sheltering them, and the memory of that moonlight night always with them. Passion may be outlived, but cut short like that it is petrified into a memory, which would take the place of all the joys of life. What chance would the living wife have compared with the dead mistress? There," breaking off, "you are not old enough to reason or understand,—you can only listen to my ravings. But the story is a tragic one—some day I shall embody it all in music."

They were too interested in their talk to be aware of the rapidly closing twilight, and they both started when a voice reached their ears. But at the sound it was Antoine Lütz who looked round quickest, and who first spoke.

"Emilie?"

It was evident for the moment that Dolores was entirely forgotten. Young as she was, set apart as her youth had been from love, or any talk of it, there was no need of an interpreter here, as she glanced from Antoine Lütz to Emilie Desprez.

There was no doubt now if she were pretty. With that colour in her cheeks, and that tender look in her eyes, she was more nearly beautiful than it was possible for those who knew her usually to imagine.

He had taken her hand, he still held it; and there was something in the tender eagerness with which she looked at him, which suggested a mother's anxious love more than the young passion of a woman.

"You are not looking well; you have been ill?"

"I am not strong, as you know, but never mind that now. Let us speak of other things; it is so seldom we meet alone."

At the last word Emilie smiled, and turning, took Dolores' hand in hers.

"No; I am no longer always alone, I have a little sister to love and care for. But we must not linger, it is time that we returned. For you also the evening air is bad, especially on a chill misty night like this."

They turned away then under the shadow of the trees, the man and woman side by side, speaking in a language which showed long and intimate knowledge of each other's hearts and work; their young companion silent by Emilie's side, thinking over the story she had heard, letting it mingle vaguely with this other story that was being told under the trees. It was her first glimpse of the romance of the world, and this slight delicate man, with the eyes that

seemed alternately burning with passion and softening into tender dreaminess, acquired a new interest.

The others did not heed her presence; she was aware that under the darkening twilight Emilie's ungloved hand rested in that of the musician, that her steps grew slower as they approached the little door in the wall where they must separate. Something then made her move on more quickly—beyond reach of the voices which had sunk a little when the moment of parting had come, and with her hand on the lock she waited until, at a slight touch on her arm, she looked up to see Emilie standing alone by her side.

Whiter than she had been when she saw her last, and with a little tremble in her voice.

“It is growing late, Dolores; we must go home, or my father will have arrived and be wondering where we are.”

Her voice was very unsteady, and when she had spoken she clasped the girl's hand with her slight trembling fingers, as if to prevent her doing as she herself had suggested, and open the gate; then in the momentary pause she stooped and kissed her cheek.

“We have loved each other for a long time”—her voice was steadier now. “It is very unhappy as it is, but do not imagine that I think he is mistaken. If he had done as my father wished, we should have been married long ago; but I would not have you, dear little Dolores, think that I regret.”

And at the puzzled look in the girl's face—"No," she said again, "he was quite right, a man must be free ; he would have been a slave if he had done as my father wished, and lived on, just working as he desired."

"But a woman should be free also," Dolores answered. "You are old enough to choose—why should you not marry him even as he is?"

With momentary interest, Emilie listened to the girl.

"My father would not allow it," she said then.

"But he has no right," Dolores insisted, her sturdy common-sense fighting the one objection, and with all the insistence of youth, seeing but the one broad barrier instead of the thousand slight dividing strands. "If he cares, and so do you, why should you sacrifice him?"

It was a point of view that had not often occurred to Emilie Desprez, to think that on any subject there might be contending duties. Perhaps such was also the case with Dolores, who with the enthusiasm of romantic youth saw but the one side, whilst Emilie, fearing her own heart, had taught herself to consider but the other. Self-denial is often easier than justice even to ourselves.

CHAPTER IV.

“ Make your own terms with life while you are fair.”

WHEN they re-entered the house, it was to find M. Desprez had already returned and was awaiting them. More genial, more cheerful, more successful, so it appeared to Dolores, than ever. Perhaps it was the effect of contrast that thus impressed her.

His excursion, which had been to see a singer who was to take part in the new operetta that was to be produced during the winter, had been accomplished, and content and satisfaction was in every word and look.

“ It is such luck to have found her, and disengaged; she is just the actress I want. Enough voice,” with a little shrug of the shoulders; “ more than enough beauty, which is really more important, and—*chic*—just the very thing—she will ensure success.”

The word seemed always about: it found its way into the very air they breathed.

“ There is no fear of anything else,” his daughter

replied, smiling kindly, "you will not have to take off your laurel wreath yet."

"No, I think not, though it is unlucky, they say, to make too sure; but know your audience, and then give it what it wants, that is the royal road—and talking of royal roads, the Princess returns almost immediately, so that I have little time to lose."

"Is she to be allowed to hear Dolores sing?"

"I shall put it off as long as I can, but it will scarcely be possible, I fear, to prevent it. She is so fond of anything new; but it must be accorded as a favour, and to her alone."

They had risen from table, and M. Desprez was lighting his pipe as he spoke. "Know your own value, child," he added, "that is a very important thing to know. Always bear in mind that the world is only too glad to put a low price on what it wants; but remember also that it is quite prepared, if met with a refusal, to pay a high one. Only you must not make the mistake of offering what it does not care for."

"But, father," Emilie suggested, gently, "the world is made up of individuals, and they are not always wise; how should their judgment be infallible? The mistakes of individuals are proverbial."

"Perhaps so, but taken *en masse* it is different: it is the judgment of the mass that creates the success or failure of the moment, and there is little use offering you a golden crown when you are dead."

Emilie looked unconvinced, though she said noth-

ing further, and the talk drifted away into the approaching winter season, and the music which it was the duty and pleasure of M. Desprez to provide.

Later, when Dolores had gone to bed, it was of her the father and daughter spoke.

"Would it not be as well," Emilie had suggested, "to keep her away from the Court if possible. She is very young, only just sixteen, and it would, I am sure, be unadvisable that she should see or hear much that goes on there."

"She must learn the world," her father replied; "the sooner the better. She is young, of course, but she must appear in public before long. There is no use hiding facts from people. Look at yourself; acclimatisation is the best thing."

"Yes," objected Emilie; "but I was acclimatised from my cradle—it will be different with her."

"Oh, we will look after her," he answered, lightly, "and she is wise and good: there is little to fear."

"And trusting," the woman answered. "It is a pity, is it not, if it can be helped, that even her heart should suffer?"

If there were a shadowy irony in the words, it was so unaccustomed that it passed unobserved.

"Hearts," and M. Desprez smiled, "hearts should be healthy, and then they don't trouble their owners."

"Perhaps so; but once wounded they cease to be healthy."

It was not often Emilie Desprez argued even so much with him with whom she lived. Instinctively

she avoided topics of discussion. For herself, peace was so dear that perhaps she was tempted to offer too high a price for it ; and as to M. Desprez, he was not one to seek below the surface, or even to fear the search would be unpleasant. His somewhat loud-voiced joviality was pleased best by corresponding good temper and satisfaction in those with whom his lot was cast. The sensitiveness that shrank from exposing a wound, and dreaded any careless or rough approach to it, found no response in him. Wounds, ill health, all that meant a second place in life's battle, and were to be avoided, because they jarred upon his own satisfaction, and cast a cloud over his little world. The characteristic had its good side for those with whom he came in contact. If it were impossible to avoid grief and trouble, the love of sunshine made him willing to do almost anything to relieve it, though naturally to avoid it was the first desire, and the one which most often was carried out.

But to Dolores, unaccustomed to demonstrative affection or an atmosphere of cheerful kindness, there was much in Charles Desprez that appealed strongly. For all their disagreements, he was dearly loved by his daughter, whose keener sense judged his mistaken views and narrow ideals, and to Dolores his geniality and kindness were so dear that it was real grief to fancy that he might be wrong : an apparent contradiction to youth lets in so much future doubt and difficulty, that to imagine selfishness and egotism under the guise of constant good-

tempered geniality was far more difficult and painful than under that of any disagreeable peculiarity.

The world is divided for us, to begin with, into good and bad. To have the one almost imperceptibly encroaching on the other's kingdom, usurping the other's rights and wrongs, is confusing to all moral sense, and destroys the foundations on which life is built. Afterwards, we are content to admit that we must adapt ourselves to the facts about us, and that all our bitter disappointment, all our sorrowful crying out, will not alter the world in which we live, and that we must either rebuild on fresh and surer knowledge, or be content to remain amid the ruins of our imagination.

A month later the leaves were all lying under the trees in the park, and the trees themselves stretched bare branches abroad under a dull rainy sky.

Even M. Desprez shivered as he stepped out into the cold raw air to enter his comfortable brougham. Though not susceptible to cold, there was something so penetrating in the rain, which was scarcely more than falling fog, that it reached through his warm, fur-lined coat. Standing for a second at his carriage-door, looking back with a smile to the window where his daughter and Dolores stood, some one passed him, walking slowly with bent head, apparently heedless of the inclement night—passed him so close that he was aware in a moment who it was, and almost before realising it, he had spoken. "Good

evening." The passer-by paused at the voice, and lifting his bent head showed the wan face and brilliant eyes of Antoine Lütz.

"Good evening, monsieur," he repeated, as if mechanically, then paused and coughed.

That first remark had escaped M. Desprez unintentionally, but now he was well aware of all he would so gladly have escaped seeing. The thin overcoat, so inefficient a protection against the soaking fog—the cough—the worn, lined face.

"It is a bad night for you to be out in—these first foggy nights are treacherous."

It is to be doubted if any one had ever heard a harsh unkind word from Charles Desprez, his instincts and wishes were too kind; and yet his daughter had never contemplated the possibility of a fight with him for the man she loved.

What is the unknown power that an egotist holds in reserve, and by which he rules so successfully his little world?

But brought face to face with Antoine, a position he would willingly have avoided, it was not of his unhappy love-affair he was thinking—it is doubtful if that would have distressed him much, even if he could have realised it—but the self-evident fact that the man was not properly clothed or fed.

In answer to his words, "I am on my way to give a lesson," Lütz replied: "it is, as you say, a bad night to be out in."

There was no reflection in the speech—there

seemed indeed no possible answer to make to it. A moment later they had separated again: Lütz was continuing his walk, coughing more, as if the disturbance of his dream had made his material sufferings reassert themselves, conscious with the loss of his dream that he was cold and wet and hungry, with the prospect of an hour's lesson under those disadvantageous circumstances; while M. Desprez, in his white shirt and diamond studs, wrapped in his fur coat, was being driven rapidly away to the Palace.

For a few minutes, haunted by the recollection of him to whom he had spoken—so much haunted that it needed a little sentence spoken aloud to enable him to regain his previous conscious satisfaction.

“He had his chance,” he said aloud, “few men have been given a better. I believe he had it in him to make his way in the world, and I am rarely mistaken. But if a man does not accept his chance when it is offered,”—he shrugged his shoulders,—“he has, as a rule, made up his mind once for all.”

Nevertheless, now and again, through the warm darkness of the brougham, appeared the white thin face of Antoine Lütz, something reproachful in it which had no right to be there; and which, notwithstanding, made him vaguely uncomfortable.

That is the worst of sensitiveness; discomfort may approach it in so many forms that, in a world liable to sorrow and sickness, mistake and failure, even confident self-satisfaction and success is liable

to be met on its way, and be rendered uncomfortable by that which in no way concerns it. Fortunately there is always another side to the picture. To one who has learned the way to please his world, and who fills the position of always successfully providing its pleasures, there is a sure and certain niche always awaiting him. It is premature fame—but possibly, like everything else, must be bought at a price; fame is averse to blowing trumpet-blasts both during life and after death. Generally it is this or that—and how unsatisfactory a trumpet-blast would be to ears closed for ever, M. Desprez would have argued—so having paid his price, which necessitated also a fair amount of work, no one should grudge him his reward. And few did. If there was one popular idol in Ingelheim it was Charles Desprez. And it added to his charm that he was no veiled idol, but always ready and willing to mingle with his worshippers.

To-night, when he was shown into the presence of the Princess, at the sight of his happy fresh-coloured face and tall fine figure, slightly inclining now towards *embonpoint*, there were evident tokens of satisfaction. There was a pause in the conversation, and many expressions of welcome, and to be welcomed by Elvira, Princess of Ingelheim, with such a smile, was worth something in the life of any man.

She was in truth a beautiful woman, a blonde, but not languid and lustreless, as so many fair women are, but a vivid blonde; eyes of sapphire blue, which

one felt could flame with passion; hair of sunny gold, in thick masses about a well-poised proud head; a fair complexion, into which the colour seldom came, but a fairness intensified by the arch of the brows of a darker shade than the bright hair, and the long straight lashes. A tall woman, with a full, beautiful figure, everything about her denoting the imperious pride of power and beauty; and yet, withal, a something that told, that with all it had to give, life sufficed but little to satisfy the spirit that slept, or perhaps suffered, behind those lovely eyes. Such was, outwardly at least, the mother of the little Prince, whose blond head and smiling eyes were well known, as he rode on his pony or drove by his mother's side through the streets of Ingelheim. No signs of discontent for the moment; she was smiling, and perhaps the slight sense of dissatisfaction was only a shadow one felt *might* darken the eyes, never alter the youthful contour of the face, which was more round than oval, with a mouth, a trifle large perhaps, but beautiful in form: it was the face of a brilliant living woman, over which the lights and shadows passed in quick succession, and which it would have been difficult, beautiful as it was, to picture carved in marble. Splendid possibilities, one might have said and sighed; for possibilities have a way of being crushed out of fulfilment when a woman stands alone at five-and-twenty in a position where flattery is more obtainable than help; where power has been given into hands before the

discipline of life has taught its fateful use. The chances are in favour of a strong undisciplined nature, only held in check by pride, writing its own life on the lives of those around.

But of moralists and observers there were not many here. Most of those present envied or admired, as the case might be, giving little thought to the real life of the girl married in the full spring of youth to the widowed greybeard, who had died so shortly after, leaving her with the little fair-haired son. A loveless marriage, three years of loneliness, to which flattery and admiration had been willing servitors—and as an inheritance the passionate blood of Venetian ancestors, as well as their proud beauty and bright hair; and in addition deep down, out of sight, a modern complexity of thought and feeling, which made the very life she chose and lived, which she enforced in those about her, seem unsatisfactory and empty.

It is sad to have realised better things, and to be obliged to resign them and accept the worse; but it is sadder to have the instincts which seek for something beyond the daily bread, and not even to know what it is of which we stand in need.

“Welcome, monsieur; you bring good news. I trust all goes well with the rehearsals?”

“All goes well, your Highness,” he repeated.

“And how soon may we hope that our curiosity will be gratified? One week? Two?”

“You will stretch your curiosity, will you not, until

the New Year, and in the meantime it shall not be idle waiting, I promise."

"There is only one law that is never disobeyed in Ingelheim," she retorted, with a smile, "and that is the will of Monsieur Desprez. Sit down and tell me all that you have to tell,—about this new pupil? Is curiosity to wait in that case also?"

There was little etiquette demanded at these weekly tea-drinkings, and by those to whom the *entrée* was given, they were much enjoyed. By some, perhaps by those on whom the doors were shut, it was considered that etiquette might have held a tighter rein; but after all it was but a small slight shadow of a Court, and the reins were in such young hands that there was little cause to wonder at the result.

There was music and talking, cards, and sometimes needlework in the hands of the ladies about the Court, who, whilst the Princess was amused, were free to amuse themselves also.

As is the habit also, where there is one recognised will which has to be obeyed, when *ennui*, or dissatisfaction, or anything else worse, reigned in the one heart, its shadow was liable to fall thick and dark on those around. To possess power of any sort is likely to endue the owner with a lack of the perception of proportion; when self is the standard, others' wants and wishes are apt to receive scant recognition. There were several notable-looking people in the room—a celebrity of any kind was always sure of a good reception; and even to those

who had not yet mounted the ladder, but only stretched out eager hands towards it, there was a welcome. It flattered and pleased Princess Elvira that poets should sing her charms, and painters paint her brilliant hair and blue eyes.

To-night there were several new people present, M. Desprez recognised even as he talked, though they were of no especial interest from his point of view. But when his audience was over, and the Princess had turned towards another, he joined an elderly man standing apart for the moment watching the talkers, and addressed him.

“Good evening, Excellency.”

The man addressed turned a keen clever face towards the speaker. Something of youth still in the eyes despite the grey hair and worn face. This was the man who gave what ballast was needed to that passionate impetuous woman yonder, who strove with all the wisdom of age, and for the sake of the affection he had borne her husband, to stand between her and the follies which might have been accomplished.

For a moment it was as if his eyes, or perhaps his mind, were noting something beyond, something in which M. Desprez’s comely satisfied person had nothing to do, then it seemed impossible, as he began to speak.

“So as usual, monsieur, you have made preparations to whet our curiosity, and postpone its gratification.”

"If that be indeed so, you owe me some gratitude."

"Yes, I am willing to allow we do ; but, remember, an appetite that waits too long passes the healthy stage of hunger. When are we to be introduced to our next emotional pleasure ?"

"The Princess is willing to wait till the New Year."

"So she thinks to-night." The elder man gave a slight, almost imperceptible pause, and then added, "But you are a magician, a favoured and powerful magician. You can do as you will."

"But it does not do to strain even magic power, Excellency, when we have to deal with ladies."

"It is a source of power to recognise that fact, but M. Desprez is not likely to make a mistake."

There was a smile of satisfaction on M. Desprez's face at the compliment ; but if he had meant to answer it, he was prevented by the utterance of his name by a lady who had been standing near him, in a circle whose smiles and replies had attested the brilliancy of which she was the centre.

"M. Desprez, I am forgotten, ignored ! which can it be ? What have I done to deserve either ?"

It is difficult to describe some women ; impossible often to bring their personality in evidence through description. Virginia Shore was a fair, tall, slight woman, with brown hair and eyes of a soft clear brown. By the side of the glowing beauty of the Princess, she looked slender and colourless, and yet

no one had ever spoken to her, who had failed to describe her as beautiful.

She was also brilliant and amusing, a necessary passport to favour in this Court ; but in her brilliance and wit there was a quality which made those about her dread her enmity : somewhere, outside, beyond the charmed precincts of the reception-room, there were found those who dared to whisper that the Princess feared the words that might fall from those dainty lips — lips that somehow, even when they smiled, gave a faint token that they could utter little malicious, sharp-pointed words. But malice, at least a faint *soupeçon* of it, when the speaker is fair and young, and it is our acquaintances against whom the shaft is winged, is a pleasing admixture in the sweets of life.

She was of English parentage, as her name announced ; her father, Colonel Sir Lucian Shore, had been attached to the Court of Ingelheim, had married a noble German wife, and having adopted her land as a home, had somewhat sunk his nationality in hers.

He had died, so had his wife, and Virginia and her brother had lived on in the only home she had known ; companion, daughter in all but name, of the late Princess, who had been mother-in-law to this proud widowed beauty.

She resembled her father, so those said who remembered the slight handsome man who had lived here once upon a time, and had made himself re-

membered, if not loved, by a certain brilliance of speech which rarely had spared either friend or foe.

But in the fair brown hair and eyes of his daughter lived again the softer type of the German mother, who had loved the dead Englishman so well that even his hardness had been modified by her tenderness; perhaps, who knows, some of her tenderheartedness may have been inherited as well. Though by those who knew them it was commonly said that all the German tenderness had gone to the brother, all the English hardness to the sister.

They were alike, as brother and sister so often are, in feature and voice, that indescribable something which is called family likeness, and yet, similar as was the type, the individuality was widely different. She was smiling now as she addressed M. Desprez, and in the smile was apparent all her winning charm, as she turned towards him, soft white draperies falling closely about her, a golden girdle round her slender waist, gold ornaments in the light-brown hair, which curled in soft natural curls about her head, and shaded her white forehead.

"You did not wish to ignore me—then I suppose I must conclude I was forgotten. Better to be hated! We are told that it is indifference—not hatred—that is the opposite of love."

"It is easy to hide hate," quoted M. Desprez, "hard to hide love, hardest of all to hide indifference."

"You have set me there a puzzle which it will take time and solitude to unravel. Tell me in the meantime when we are to hear the new siren sing."

"M. Desprez will not tell you that, for all your enchantments and smiles, Miss Shore," his Excellency here interposed; "we have all tried, but he is adamant."

"Ah, perhaps you have not tried the right way—leave him to me."

"And how," asked M. Desprez, "are you going to draw my secret from me, or try to do so?"

"By flattery, dear monsieur. Men, you know, like flattery, and women attention."

His Excellency laughed.

"Ah, Miss Shore, you know too much; you should not have learnt all that until you are as old as I am."

"On the contrary, Excellency, I mean to be profiting by my knowledge then. You, I suppose, spent your youth in learning also."

"Learning?" he repeated. The question was lightly put, but there was a shade of something beyond mere frivolity in her eyes, "Learning what?"

"Oh, to understand what is invisibly going on around you."

Between the laughing group, of which Virginia was one, and the Princess, holding a low-voiced conversation at the other end of the room, stood a solitary man's figure. He had been one of the talkers,

or perhaps listeners, until the girl had turned aside to speak to M. Desprez, and then, as if unaware of what he was doing, had remained on in the same attitude, evident absence of thought in eyes and expression. A noticeable man enough ; handsome, dark-eyed, dark-haired, standing thus silent in the gaily lit room.

When she had spoken, the girl's eyes did not rest on his Excellency's face. They wandered for a moment round the room, as if in careless amusement at all those therein, and in their passage they rested for a moment on the smooth dark head that came in their line of vision. Only for a moment—from that they were immediately lifted to the keen grey eyes watching her ; but now they held a faint shadow of nervous defiance, or so it seemed.

“ You are right, Miss Shore,” the man replied ; “ but I suppose the main charm of the invisible is that we can give it any interpretation we please.”

“ Prince Lescynski ”—the dark-haired man had drawn near, it was to him Miss Shore addressed her words—“ have you realised that his Excellency is here amongst us, outwardly a safe friend, in reality reading our thoughts and profiting by our follies ? ”

“ I protest,” objected his Excellency, but his eyes were noting the two speakers.

“ We must be a source of amusement, don't you think, to any one who can see inside us ? ”

“ That depends on the seer,” returned the man.

"I should think our follies, as you call them, would not always amuse."

"Oh yes, they would," the girl replied, lightly; "because a seer is always old enough to have out-lived follies."

"And you think that makes him pitiless," queried his Excellency. "You are wrong, youth is far harder."

"Virginia." It was the Princess's voice that disturbed the conversation. She was leaning forward, and it was with sudden decision she spoke. "Virginia, let us have some music," and as Miss Shore moved to the piano, with the graceful somewhat swift step which was peculiarly her own, "Prince Lescynski," the Princess said in her soft *trainante* voice, "I want to ask you about to-morrow's ride."

The decisive voice had necessitated a change. The two separated, only the grey-haired spectator was left, but his eyes glanced from the one to the other as they moved away. They followed Virginia till she was seated at the piano and had begun to play one of Mendelssohn's songs, and then they turned to where the man stood by the side of the Princess. The absent-mindedness had vanished now from the dark eyes, that had kindled into eager interest.

A man of whom it would be safe to foretell that when the time should come he would recklessly give his all to gain his desire: a man of whom it would be vain to predict his future, if his all could not

purchase his desire. "Fire and tow," was the grey-beard's thought, but his looks wandered as he so thought from the one woman to the other.

Mendelssohn's music was finished, no more was asked for, and apparently taking that fact for permission to leave the instrument, Miss Shore rose, and the movement being unregarded, she returned to the corner where M. Desprez still stood.

"Tell me about your new singer," she said. She did not sit down, but remained standing with her back to the curtains, from whence it was easy to watch the golden-haired Princess still talking to Prince Lescynski.

"A girl, is it not, an English girl, I am told. You must bring her to me."

"You are very kind."

"Interested kindness, you would insinuate? Well, I daresay it is. We often want new interests here; but you are not going to bring her, all the same?"

"Not yet."

"In the meantime you will give us something else to amuse us? We need it; we have had a dull summer," with momentary bitterness, "we want something to help us to forget it."

"It is impossible for me to believe that you and dulness could ever be companions."

"It is a secret which please hide, but the truth is, that my brain creaks now as it revolves, so rusty is it."

M. Desprez smiled.

"Well, what shall I do for you? An operetta, that is already promised."

"Did it ever strike you, monsieur, that to those who live always on a stage, theatricals are no novelty? No it would not"—she shook her head,—"because you are not always on the stage, so it is a novelty, and therefore an amusement. Tell me," with sudden change of tone, "what has become of your last pupil, Antoine Lütz? I thought he was destined to be a leaf in your laurel crown."

"I shared your hope at one time; but he is opinionated, and I fear suffering from the effect. And yet I could have sworn ten years ago that he had extraordinary talent."

"Perhaps it was genius?" suggested Virginia; "it is sometimes more difficult to discover."

The words were in a measure irritating, in so far that they recalled to memory, just as happier sights had banished it, the worn face, the thin coat, the harassing cough, that had this evening disturbed him.

"Miss Shore," he spoke a little more quickly than was habitual—it was annoying to have brought before him that which he had no wish to recall, "a man is surely bound to make use of the help that is offered him. If he refuses, he must be prepared to take the consequences."

"He, I suppose, took a different view of things in general from what you did?"

"He took his choice," M. Desprez repeated;

"probably he expected he would have both this *and* that. Fortune, however, seldom holds out both hands," he added, sententiously.

"The old question, M. Desprez, was in his mind, I suppose; ought we to utilise or to compel circumstance?"

"He has found out his mistake, I think. But it is a pity he was obstinate. I would have forced him into a groove that would have set him above risk."

"You would have done for him as you have done for yourself, eh? Well, one can't do more than ask one's neighbour to share one's light, whether a farthing dip or an electric lamp; but the answer to the old question is, that, as a rule, talent utilises, and genius compels."

There was no apparent point to her words, no apparent consecutiveness in those that followed.

"And Miss Desprez, is she well? will you spare her to me? If I may not make the acquaintance of the new star, I must have recourse to duets. You will allow Miss Desprez to come and play with me?"

The smiles had returned to M. Desprez, the serenity to his soul.

Yes, of a certainty, Emilie would be delighted. Miss Shore had but to name her own time.

There was a little stir in the room, the Princess had risen, still talking to Prince Lescynski, and was standing with her back to the open fireplace, the large fan with which she had been shading her eyes from the flame unfurled.

"It is not for its beauty only," she said, "I value it; it is historical also. See, this tiny gold pendant," lifting it, so that the diamond fastening flashed in the light, "holds a few drops of deadliest poison. It was placed there in the days when poison was the fashion."

She gave a little laugh as she spoke, but there was none reflected in her restless eyes, which were turned now towards his Excellency, who had approached.

"What a terrible possession, Princess!" he said. "If I might advise, I should suggest replacing the poison with attar of roses."

"No, never," she answered, "it is like every other deadly thing—a power—that it is as well to hold control over."

"May I see it?" His Excellency took it into his hands—a splendid fan with a jewelled crown, a monogram, and depending from it the tiny trinket which held the deadly secret.

"It belonged to an ancestress of mine," the Princess explained. "She had it made in the days when such poisons were to be obtained: it holds six drops, I am told, but one, they say, would be sufficient."

"Does history not tell what was her object?" inquired Prince Lescynski. He had not spoken before, but now he lifted his dark passionate eyes to the Princess. "What did the lady require with such a weapon?"

"Who knows?" The Princess shrugged her shoulders slightly. "An enemy, a rival, herself,

who can tell what she meant to do? Tradition says she died before her opportunity came of using it, and hence the fact of its being still unsealed."

"A pretty toy," his Excellency said, and handed it back, "and a dangerous toy should it fall into the hands of an unhappy woman."

The slightest flush passed over the fairness of the Princess's face as she took it.

"And therefore so safe in yours," Prince Lesceynski observed. It was through his hands it passed back to its owner.

She did not acknowledge the words, perhaps did not hear them. There was a slight excitement visible in her whole form, brought there as she told her story. With just such golden hair, with just such sea-blue eyes, might the other woman of those bygone days have stood in her triumphant beauty, the fan with its hidden power in her hand, when she knew that now at length nothing stood between her and her revenge. Only then, at that supreme moment, death had stepped in, death, whose dogging shadow she had for the moment forgotten.

"They lacked invention in those days." It was Virginia's clear cold voice that broke the momentary silence after the excitable words of the other woman. "Instead of putting the rival out of the way, it would have been just as easy to spoil her life for her."

"And how would you have suggested setting about it?"

"Ah, there are plenty of ways, Excellency, if one

gives one's attention to it. Why, life is even considered too short for discomfort, at least that is a lesson we might, I am sure, learn from men, if we chose to apply ourselves. It is possible to learn valuable lessons, you see, from men as well"—with a glance towards the fan—"as from women."

CHAPTER V.

“Openness has the mischief, though not the malice, of treachery.”

VIRGINIA SHORE had a sitting-room in the Palace, with a view over the gardens, where Dolores had met and talked to the musician. The two principal windows looked towards M. Desprez's house, and the little door to which he held a key; but in a deep recess—it was a queer old house, full of unexpected corners—there was one tall narrow window from which were visible the waters of the lake. In this recess Miss Shore generally sat when alone—the view pleased her;—with a book or work in her hands, she could amuse herself with her own thoughts, or those of other people. This afternoon, awaiting an expected visit from Emilie Desprez, she was sufficiently amused with her own thoughts to require no book or other occupation for the mind.

“Many interpretations might be put upon such an action,” she was thinking; “some would think me kind, and others unwise, but the simple truth is that I am very much in want of amusement, and

unfortunately nothing amuses me except emotional pleasures."

She rose, and putting aside her work, left the recess, which made almost a second room within the first, and began pacing up and down the larger one beyond.

It was a strange apartment for a woman's, and a woman's especially with whom no other taste had come in contact. The walls were painted a dull dark red from the tall old-fashioned oak wainscoting to the ceiling. Two or three engravings stood out against the sombre background; but they were not nearly as noticeable as the many and various weapons, the crossed swords above the pictures, the slender spears which held back the curtains, the daggers and rapiers above the high old-fashioned mantelshelf.

The rapiers were her brother's. Jerome Shore was reputed to be possessed of great skill in their use, and there was a rumour current that Miss Shore herself was no mean proficient in the art.

Her walk to and fro was interrupted by a knock, and at her "Come in," her brother entered.

"Jerome!" There was real satisfaction in look and voice as she turned and saw him—"you?"

"Yes, I. It is an unexpected reprieve, but I have just learned that I shall be here for another fortnight."

"Ah, why does not the War Office make up its mind?" she said, with a sigh of comic exaggeration.

“Had I only known you would have been here, I should have been spared seeking for amusement, and should possibly have left ill alone.”

“Possibly,” he assented.

Sometimes when he said a little semi-sharp thing, there was a slight accentuation of the likeness to his sister; but the malice in his words left no suggestion that there might be more than a passing wish to amuse, the tenderness of the grey eyes were at variance with the momentary sharpness. When Virginia was sharp, it was only then one saw how cold her eyes could become.

“And what mischief are you hatching here that War Offices might have prevented?” was his next question. “May I escape first?”

“No, certainly not,” but she did not explain further. Her eyes wandered round the room, from the dull walls, where the glow from the open fireplace was reflected from the various weapons to the fire itself, and then, as if continuing her speech, “And Prince Lesceynski, does he remain also?”

There was a gesture of assent, and then immediately after, “I’ll tell you though, Virginia,” and he leaned towards her, lowering his voice, “it would be rather a good thing, I fancy, if he went—and stayed,” after a pause.

“Why do you say that?”

Virginia rose and took down a fan from the shelf, and held it between her and the flame whilst speaking.

“You have not guessed? Well, observations in Courts are dangerous always and indiscreet generally; but he is my friend, and you are trustworthy—he is too good to be made a fool of by a coquette.”

“And you think,” Virginia’s eyes were quite steady now, though there was a faint but distinct line of colour across her cheeks—“and you think that princesses like slaves just as well as other women?”

“I don’t believe there’s a woman living,” cried the man impetuously, “who would spare a man making a fool of himself, if she knew his whole future here and hereafter depended on it!”

“I don’t think there is,” calmly assented his sister, “so,” with a little laugh, “there is no use growing excited over self-evident propositions. Did you expect to be contradicted?” As he did not reply, “My dear Jerome, if you expect politeness and sentimentalities, you know there is no use coming to me. But tell me more,” after a pause, “does he talk? what does he say?”

“If he talked he would be cured, or on the way to it. On the contrary, he is drifting into despair day by day.”

“Well, drowning is an easy death, so they say.”

Virginia had risen again with unusual restlessness, and was fingering the short dagger above the fireplace.

“That’s a delusion. It may be so to weak people;

strong people would struggle, and it would be very painful."

"You have discovered something very clever and true in that, Jerome; let it be a lesson to you to learn when *not* to struggle."

"May I smoke, in the meantime?"

"Certainly. Does not this room look like an invitation to do so? Presently Antoine Lütz is coming to play to me; you remember him, Desprez's failure? When he comes, we will make him play, and you shall practise the sword-dance. It is a long time since I have seen it."

An hour later there was a low hesitating knock at the outer door, before which hung a heavy curtain, a knock unheard by those within; then the door was softly unfastened, the curtain lifted, and unseen for the moment, Emilie Desprez was granted a vision of Virginia Shore, with flushed cheeks and eyes shining with excitement, her soft skirts over her arm, performing wonderful graceful evolutions in the centre of the room, an unsheathed sword at her feet, whilst Jerome Shore applauded from where he stood against the wall watching, and Antoine's violin played the graceful accompaniment. In one moment all the rest was a mere picture, and he, this worn shabby man, with his violin creating these magic strains, was the only reality, then she had been recognised, and Virginia paused, brushing back with one hand her loosened hair, and speaking with little pants between her words.

“Miss Desprez, I have not gone mad, as you might suppose; but he challenged me to it, perhaps,” smiling, “because he was lazy. He is my brother, Captain Shore. You do not know him? This other friend you do; he is going to accompany me on the violin, as he has a spare afternoon.”

Emilie had recovered her presence of mind, though the colour had not returned to her cheeks; but she was well aware that Miss Shore’s eyes were upon her, and they were eyes that always saw what they wished to see.

“Why had she done this?” She knew enough to have a meaning in such an action!

Such was the first passionate thought after she had had a little time in which to recover, but for any reason, at any price, this was a good and happy hour to have wrested from fate.

Captain Shore did not go, he lingered, now leaning against the chimneypiece with a cigarette, now talking in undertones to his sister, who had returned to her low seat by the fire, now listening to the magic of Antoine’s violin.

“I am not in the humour to practise, after all,” Miss Shore said; “the rain, or the sword-dance, or my brother’s unexpected return, have entirely changed my mind, and music is out of the question. I feel far more inclined for——”

“What?” queried Jerome, as her eyes roved round the room. “These?” touching the foils over the mantelshelf.

The colour flushed into her cheeks, her eyes brightened almost imperceptibly. She smiled, and took the weapon he held out; but whilst she yet hesitated with it in her hand, a servant entered to say that Prince Lescynski was without, asking for Captain Shore.

"I told him I should be here."

"Ask him in," she said, briefly, and then turned her head to welcome him, the foil still in her hand.

In the rapidly fading twilight, in this room, with its quaint surroundings and dull-red walls, Prince Lescynski's dark classic head was more noticeable than it had been the previous night. It was all a suitable background, and gave something of stage effect, with the lights and low music at the further end, and Virginia still standing in her white dress in the centre of the room.

"Fencing?" the new-comer questioned, with a smile that lightened his eyes like a ray of light; "Jerome, you might have invited me before."

"No;" it was Miss Shore who answered, "my lessons don't take place in public."

"But when lesson-time is over?"

"Then I am going to persuade M. Desprez to write an opera, in which there is an important part which I shall take, and so provide amusement for my friends. Is it not an unselfish idea?"

"It is," he assented. "I hope I shall be here to applaud."

"Are you going to be away for long? I hear your departure is postponed for a fortnight."

She was now sitting down; in the fireglow her eyes were shining, her clear-cut features distinctly outlined against the crimson surroundings, a fan of pheasant's feathers in her hand. Jerome had sauntered over to the window, they were virtually alone.

"No; if present intentions hold good, we shall be away for about a month."

"Whose present intentions?"

She put the question so clearly, that the man looked up with a momentary disturbed expression, which might have seemed as if he feared he had betrayed himself, and he hesitated a moment before replying. "I suppose," he said then, "that we are at the mercy of the State."

"I suppose so," she assented. "Jerome calls it the War Office, or the General, or somebody. Talk about man being independent," she added, after a moment, "he may be born so, but he does not long remain satisfied with being so."

"It is only that he does not talk about it so much," Captain Shore interpolated; "it is his inheritance, so he does not keep on calling attention to it."

"Or to the bad use he makes of it."

"Even that observation, my dear, will not draw me into a discussion."

"I thought Miss Shore was announcing that we were not independent, even though we had the permission to be so," said Prince Lescynski.

"That was my original remark," she replied, "or something like it. And is it not true," turning to her brother, "that men are never content till they have sold their birthright, if, as Prince Lesceynski asserts, their freedom *is* their birthright?"

Her eyes moved slowly from the one man to the other. There was a momentary hesitation, as if an answer were not easy. It was Jerome who spoke at last, though a trifle nervously. "Well, I suppose if it is so—and I said I would not argue—that men have a certain amount of fighting to go through, and afterwards they are glad of peace."

"Yes," she assented, coldly, "at any price."

"Perhaps you are right, Miss Shore." Prince Lesceynski rose as he spoke. "Many men struggle over the Alps to fail at Capua."

"Which means, I suppose, that war suits you better than peace?"

"I am not going to argue," Captain Shore interposed, "as I have already warned you, but let me observe that the well-merited reward of fighting is the following peace. We fight for what we want and get it: women go without."

"Do they?" Virginia queried; "that is surely a new theory."

"Such a new theory," added Prince Lesceynski, "that I don't think it has come into ordinary usage yet."

With a swift movement Virginia turned and faced the last speaker; the transition in the tones of her

voice was almost as swift. "It is scarcely surprising," she said, "considering the circumstances of their lives, that women should stretch out their hands expecting them to be filled ; but that it should be so common with men," shrugging her shoulders slightly, "is always a revelation, they ought to know better."

Assuredly the man's voice was calmer than the woman's, though there was a quick flash in the eyes, that betrayed a momentary excitement. "Their education lacks something, I suppose. What is it ?"

He made a half-step nearer. There was a reflection of earnestness in his eyes, as if he hoped her answer might be of use or comfort.

"What is it ?" she repeated, with a slight mocking intonation ; "superficiality ? Do cultivate it. It is the secret of slipping through life with the greatest ease. It is born with most women, but even men," with a little laugh, "can acquire it with time and patience."

He looked at her for a moment in silence, whilst the little smile died away, and the eyes gradually grew colder, as they had a way of doing when her face was in repose, a coldness accentuated by the slight mocking curve of the lip.

"You have heard, I daresay, the definition of a tragedy—a theory killed by a fact. Well, it seems to me," with a sudden lowering and embittering of his voice, "that each woman accomplishes her share

of that tragedy by striving to kill any idealism that may remain about her in a man's heart."

There was a pause after his words, which ended as abruptly as the swift unaccustomed passion that had given them birth; in the following silence, there was heard one quick breath from the woman, and then the man spoke again in his usual tones.

"I beg your pardon," he said, slowly. "How injudicious it is to speak the truth! it is almost always sure to be rude." Though his tones were mocking, he did not smile.

"It should be avoided," she assented; "at the best of times, as likely as not, it is inconvenient."

"Virginia," here Jerome's voice broke in, "Miss Desprez has been telling me about her father's new star. Do you know, she is an English girl of sixteen, and that when she came here, a few months ago, she could speak neither French nor German? You must make her acquaintance."

"And how is it to be done, seeing M. Desprez will not trust her here?"

Those other words were still ringing in her ears, those other eyes looking into hers: it was so seldom any one cared to answer her sharp words, she was unaccustomed to it, and they were insulting,—the quick blood flew up into her cheeks, she got up, as if the movement would calm the tumult of her mind.

"We will swear she shall not sing, or be seen," went on Jerome Shore's kind voice, "if that will

soften M. Desprez. Eh, Virginia? She shall come to tea here, and no one shall know."

Virginia smiled an assent. "Yes, Jerome, arrange it, if you can, with Miss Desprez, and you, Miss Desprez, with your father: I have failed."

"It was not so much the *words*," she was saying the while, in answer to that other voice; "it was the look, the tone, and, above all, the apology afterwards." Then she was shaking hands with her guests, arranging with Miss Desprez when she should return. "For our practice must be postponed. My brother's unexpected return made me idle to-day; but you will come again, and if M. Desprez will allow your English friend to come, you will bring her? And you, monsieur," when Emilie's consent was gained, "you will come also?"

The second step is always so much easier than the first. Emilie was aware of lifting her eyes with a swift pleading glance, and then Antoine said, "Yes," and they had passed out together. The two men followed, and Virginia Shore in her white dress was left alone in the room, in which a couple of hours before she had stood watching the rain, and sighing for something to disturb the monotony of the day, contemplating with pleasure the dramatic entertainment she had prepared for her own amusement. A dramatic entertainment that had been played out before her scarcely observed, whilst she herself had been called upon so unexpectedly to take a principal

part. A part she was distinctly conscious of not having played well.

She seated herself by the window, clasping her hands lightly on her lap, and ran over in her mind the thoughts and words of the afternoon.

"I wish to be avenged on him for his unpleasant remark, which probably was the truth, or at least he thought it was. That is the worst of having such an extremely critical mind. I see his side of the question just as clearly as I see my own, far more clearly," with a little smile, "than he sees it himself; but all the same, I am going to ignore that, and at a convenient moment take my revenge."

On an easel in a far corner of the room was the portrait of a man in uniform. She rose and stood before it, and the likeness was so apparent that any one would have guessed the relationship.

Colonel Shore had just been of the same fine-featured delicate type as his daughter.

"I should have been a man," she said, crossing her arms and looking into the eyes which looked back with a faint smile; "I should have been freer and happier then. It matters very little if a man is keen enough to be feared—all the better perhaps—but for a woman, it is not well. She loses something, I suppose, though I am sure I don't know what. Now, you I understand. I know exactly how you felt—the very thought that made your eyes smile like that. It was at something that you had seen that you were not expected to see, probably some

well-concealed motive. I remember," she added, as she turned away, "that his Excellency once told me that if you ventured to step into people's hearts you should put on velvet shoes—excellent advice, of course—whereas my sole enjoyment is to let them know I am there, which under those circumstances they might never have found out. Come in."

A knock interrupted her. A servant with a note commanding her presence after the opera in the Princess's private rooms.

"Fate is propitious at any rate," she said, when once more alone; "it offers me my chance. We shall all meet there, and on a somewhat restricted stage. Some opportunity surely will occur of retrieving this afternoon's defeat."

Perhaps one reason why Virginia Shore so seldom had the worst of an encounter, was from that critical faculty of the mind which prevented her being blind to her own mistakes. To have suffered defeat did not mean with her to console herself in private with imaginary conquests; she was far too keen an analyst to be deceived about herself, any more than about her neighbours. Right or wrong, it was she this afternoon who had been silenced; and to be silenced, she well knew, meant to leave Prince Lescynski the victory.

"I wonder," her thoughts had taken a fresh turn, "what this afternoon was to those others. I am almost sorry that I was not alone, as I had intended to be, with them, and studied *their* story. It would have been interesting enough.

“I wonder what she feels. Good heavens!” with quick passion, “if she feels or hopes anything, why doesn’t she marry him at any cost, and know a fuller life, if only for a time? He would disappoint her, of course. He is an enthusiast, an idealist,—and all that,” with a wave of her hand, “has brought him to starvation nearly, to threadbare coats quite—a couple of years hence, he will be dead. What is the use of it all? Nothing. The only result of one’s observations is, that if it is all imagination, make use of imagination when it is so vivid, and enjoy by its light that which makes things seem real.

“What has she even to give up? Very little. Besides, M. Desprez would come round directly he had had the gratification of sympathy from those about him. He would forgive, because it would interfere with his digestion not to do so. Yes; if I were Emilie Desprez, I should risk it—and regret it ever after! The usual rule would be carried out, that woman expects and man disappoints. Is it the ignorance of women or the unsatisfactoriness of men that is to be blamed? Of this I am sure, that I have no wish to learn to shut my eyes as other women do. No,” with a backward glance at the portrait, “I am grateful for your inheritance: it well repays any slight inconvenience to its possessor. I suppose,” her thoughts ran on again, “that, like all other gifts obtained from fate, it is acquired at the expense of something else, though I don’t know what that something is. I do not love Jerome less, be-

cause I know that he is yielding where I am unmoved, that he is impressionable and impulsive, and likely to make mistakes through his very good qualities. Other people love and see nothing of all this. I can analyse his motives, actions, his very thoughts; it is an exercise of the mind, it has nothing to do with the affections. Prince Lesceynski again, I understand." She paused and smiled, and then started, as if amazed at where her thoughts had led her. "Well, in his case there is more than that; it gives me a distinct power which will serve me well. There is great gain in knowing the strength and the weakness of those about us—especially when we are anxious to strike effectively."

CHAPTER VI.

“But wrongs there are 'tis treason to forget.”

OUT in the chilly rapidly closing twilight Emilie Desprez and Antoine Lütz were lingering under the gloomy sky before separating. All her life duty had assumed for this woman but one form—to please and obey her father had been such a simple creed, that even when it had clashed with her own desires, it had still retained such power that to sorrow and obey had seemed all there was left to do.

Dolores's little sentence had momentarily stirred her.

Were there other duties possible for her? Was there any duty to this man who loved her? So easy to think there might be, when her heart so passionately consented. So difficult to remember that life is made up of duties to those with whom we come in contact, and that if they seem to clash, it must be because we are drifting out of the clear light; but to her such analysis was not possible.

This man she loved—he had suffered—how ill and worn he looked! after this weary separation, the tenderness and warmth of her heart surprised even herself. She was a woman always more tender than passionate, and to feel that he was ill and in need of comfort, it was impossible for her to deny it.

His hand was clasped in hers, her tears were falling in the semi-darkness. “Emilie, do not grieve. Tell me, what shall I do?”

“This life is insupportable,” she cried. “To see you like this, to know you are ill and uncared for. It is more than I can bear.”

“Shall I go away?” he questioned. “I only stay on because it is something to know you are near. But I can work anywhere. Tell me, if I went away, out of your life altogether, would it make it easier?”

He spoke earnestly, his thin hand caressed hers, his eyes sought hers. She was silent a moment, and then with unusual passion,—“No, Antoine, no! I cannot. Not to-night,” she pleaded more calmly, “do not ask me to decide to-night. Perhaps if I had not seen you so lately; but it seems as if being with you this afternoon has taught me all over again how dear you are to me.”

“Perhaps,” he hazarded, “it would be better if I made an excuse, and did not return.”

“No, no!” in eager tones, “I cannot say that. It is such happiness to see you even—to be with you. It cannot be wrong.” There was a faint half-ques-

tioning note in her voice; he did not answer, but stooped and kissed her.

A moment later, she was hurrying on alone through the narrow road towards her own home.

Dolores was watching for her when she arrived, and had the door open to welcome her.

"How wet you are!" she said, drawing her in. "M. Desprez is at home already," she went on, "and has been asking for you."

"I will go and take off my wet cloak."

She spoke absently; those few passionate words, that parting kiss, had created a little atmosphere which excluded or altered familiar objects. It made her disinclined for the moment to meet her father, to listen to Dolores.

"I have done nothing wrong," she thought, as she stood alone in her room. "It was by no prearrangement of mine that he was there. And, after all, I am a woman old enough to choose my own way in life."

But argue as she might, there was no resisting the chill sensation of wrong-doing. The inward monitor as often as not resents the unusual in our actions. Was it the unusual revolt against constitutional authority it was resenting now, or was there something else striving to make itself heard, a voice which spoke up for courage to announce a decision taken? Poor Emilie! there was confusion in her own mind between the just revolt and the want of courage which kept silent—scarcely was there any distinction felt between the two.

She was not a good actress, and she was conscious when she came down-stairs of there being a reflection of the inward perturbation in her face; but M. Desprez was not very observant,—he had far too much to say and think of, to have time to encourage the faculty which possibly therefore lay dormant, and his questions soon gained all he wanted to learn, without raising an alarm that anything was being held back.

At first there had been a dimly formed idea of mentioning Antoine's name, but as the time passed any casual allusion grew impossible; so when, a couple of hours later, M. Desprez retired to his study, the name had not once been mentioned.

But the weight increased, and, with that instinct of taking some half-measure that possesses women, later she followed him and laid before him Miss Shore's invitation for Dolores. "If Dolores went with me," she thought, so far, and then turned to see the effect of her words.

Somewhat to her surprise there was not an instantaneous refusal.

"There is to be no singing?" he questioned. "She is but a child," as if weighing the case. "It is not as if it were the Princess—and with you. It would be a little amusement for her, and if Miss Shore took a fancy to her, it would be of service hereafter. Yes, Emilie, I see no reason — no strong reason against it. Do you?" suddenly looking down into her eyes.

“ I—no, father,” she faltered. “ I should like it,” she added, more decidedly, “ I do not like leaving her alone.”

“ Then take her. Good night, child,” kissing her, “ I must be off to the opera ; you are looking pale,” touching her cheek with his large well-formed hand, a momentary shade of anxiety in his eyes. “ Nothing the matter, eh ?” And as she shook her head, “ Well, ask and have, you know, Emilie, even if it is the south of France, to bring back the colour to your cheeks.”

There was colour in them now,—her eyes were full of tears, her hands were trembling, so that she had to clasp them in a vain effort to steady them.

“ Father,” she began. It was a low cry of pain ; of a sudden it seemed so easy to say everything with which her heart was overburdened. What was it that had kept her silent hitherto ? And then how had it come about, the moment had gone by,—had it ever come ? All was as usual, M. Desprez, with his most joyous light-hearted air, was proposing future journeyings as recompense for present toil.

“ For the immediate present I must work, Emilie, and work hard, but afterwards we will see what can be done. Money, honestly won, hardly earned money, will do a great deal, and to give those I love pleasure, I would sacrifice everything. Perhaps Italy, who can tell ?”

As he spoke he walked towards the door and opened it.

“Good night,” he said again, “do not sit up, you are tired, I see; go to bed.”

Alone. “It is a monotonous life for her,” he said. “Directly I can get away, we must take a holiday. She looks tired and nervous—that must be set right. I could never work successfully, if I had illness or anxiety at home. That must be guarded against, and with a little care it generally can be.”

And Emilie was walking wearily up-stairs, recognising that the opportunity had come and passed.

“It is too late now to speak of him, or to allude casually to having met him this afternoon. I wonder what it was that prevented my speaking of it, when I was so moved to do so?”

Virginia Shore would have sought and analysed until the sensations of that interview were laid bare before her; would have recognised the large, well-satisfied personality of the man, which overspread the weaker nature of the woman, even as his cool white hand had enveloped her slight nervous one; would have recognised how the trembling nerves shrank away from the full overflowing physical content of the man,—a content that forbade a confidence that would assuredly annoy and disturb his composure, and which might be met by any of the thousand and one replies which overwrought nerves fear; but to Emilie no such thoughts were possible. She could only feel that he was her father, who had

always, or nearly always, been kind and good to her; that between them there was a barrier which she was incapable of destroying, and that now she had drifted so far away from loyalty and obedience, that she was passively, if not actively, deceiving him.

That troublesome, shadowy anxiety followed M. Desprez into his brougham, drove with him through the raw wintry night, descended with him at the door of the Opera, and was only banished when he stood in the well-known house, and knew himself to be the genius of the place. It was here his triumphs had been won, here, leaf by leaf, his laurel wreath had been plucked; within the narrow space of these four walls he reigned a king. It was with the consciousness of power he looked about him after entering his box, for the moment almost sorry that he had not brought Emilie: the gaiety and lights and excitement might have reacted on her as on himself, but she did not haunt his memory long. It was one of his own operettas that was to be performed, and the gay strains of the Overture had already commenced when he took his place, with a smile of honest enjoyment, as he leaned forward and listened to the exquisite perfection of the orchestra that he himself had trained.

The house was well filled; it was the first important night of the winter season, and there was something intoxicating to his temperament in this fulfilment of his early dreams. It was an intoxication of the senses; not of that subtle imaginative kind that

a more sensitive man might have experienced. There was no haunting undertone that breathed of failure where the world cried Conquest, a failure in interpreting the intangible dreams which only he knew. No, he had that rare temperament which grows rarer as the world grows older, a union of the primitive and the artistic; it was as if part of his nature had never been fully developed, and the artistic part had in consequence become almost mechanical. The quality of his music it would be for future generations to decide,—for the moment there was too much enchantment and perfection of detail for calm judgment to avail.

After the second act there were cries for the author.

“Desprez, Desprez!” those in the pit and gallery stamped and called him by his name, and in answer his well-known form appeared before the curtain for a moment, by the side of the pretty little Marquise, in powder and patches, who had sung the chief part.

It was an accustomed mark of appreciation, to which, at the beginning of the season especially, the audience was prone, but M. Desprez always appeared to appreciate it.

Perhaps one reason of his popularity was, that he was never bored, never even pretended to be; but showed the frank pleasure of a child in any expression of approbation.

He bowed smilingly around, first towards the box where the Princess—radiant in gold-coloured satin,

with a glitter of diamonds—sat in the front. She smiled, and lifting the great bouquet of lilies and yellow roses in her lap, gave it to the man standing beside her, who threw it on to the stage. The people shouted and applauded; it was a pleasing little interlude, and they appreciated this graciousness of their Princess towards their popular idol. M. Desprez picked up the flowers, and bowed his acknowledgment, then placed them in the singer's hands.

“Thank you for sparing me, Princess,” his Excellency observed; “I foresaw the destination of that bouquet from the first moment, and feared I might be called upon to perform that feat.”

The Princess turned her restless eyes towards Prince Lesceynski — perhaps unconsciously they paused there, instead of passing him by and turning towards him who had spoken — paused long enough for the passionate restlessness for a moment to grow calmer, long enough for his Excellency to speak again.

“It spoilt my pleasure in the first act, foreseeing how I should hit the man with the trombone.”

“Women cannot throw,” the Princess said, un-easily, “but I thought all men could.”

“They can throw,” retorted his Excellency, with a smile, “but they cannot all aim. You are going home?” he questioned.

“Yes,” she answered, “but Miss Shore is going with me. She is with Countess Ehrenheim: fetch

her, please." As the door closed on the elder man, "We are expecting you to supper," she said to Prince Lescynski, whilst her eyes roved over the house, "you remain on till the end?"

"No, I am leaving now."

He was standing a little behind her, so close that the gold waves of her rich hair were close to him, so close that, as her eyes strayed around, almost unconsciously he laid his hand on the back of her chair. Perhaps there was some subtle consciousness of the fact that came from the nervous force betrayed by the closed hand, for of a sudden she turned and looked straight up at him.

The expression in those passionate dark eyes looking down into hers was not difficult to read,—perhaps she knew or guessed the story in them, perhaps she did not care to observe it. Her lashes fell, she looked away, and at the same moment the door reopened, and his Excellency appeared with Miss Shore. When the air is charged with electricity, there are some people who are always aware of the fact; the two newcomers had the air of persons who have unknowingly arrived at an unwelcome moment. Perhaps it was the quick nervous glance the Princess cast towards Miss Shore, or the hasty words which she strove to say naturally, or it may have been only the disturbance of the mental atmosphere, but for the first moment there was an awkward silence.

It was on the other woman Virginia's eyes were

fixed. What she read there brought that slight mocking smile to her lips, and expression into her eyes, which made so many say of her that she would make a better friend than enemy.

It was on Prince Lescynski's arm she followed the other couple down the broad staircase; her hand barely touched it, and it was with an evident effort that he at length made an observation about the music.

"It was perfect—you enjoyed it?"

"No, I don't think I did;" and as he looked round surprised at the unexpected rejoinder, "Oh, I am not blaming M. Desprez; I was thinking of other things, and unless one can criticise one does not really enjoy."

"I differ." His tone was calmly conventional now. "Once criticism steps in, enjoyment is at an end."

"Then, I don't think you have climbed very high yet, allow me to observe, towards the secret of enjoyment."

"I *feel*," he said with momentary energy, "that suffices me."

"You may feel," her clear cold voice followed his, "*unpleasant* things, so your plan seems hardly wise, if it is enjoyment you are striving to obtain."

"And you never do?"

"It is unnecessary to analyse *them*, whereas——" she shrugged her shoulders and was silent.

"Whereas to feel," he retorted, hotly, "is a remnant of barbarism with which you have no sympathy."

"It is an indiscretion, Prince, which is generally followed by retribution."

She followed the Princess into the carriage: as they drove away his Excellency turned to the younger man, "You are returning to the theatre?" and as he shook his head, "shall I give you a lift—you are going to supper?"

"Yes, but not direct. I half promised to walk back with Shore, as he is also invited."

"I will drive you to the barracks,—a walk from there is sufficient to redeem a half-promise."

Prince Leszynski smiled and entered the brougham. At the moment he did not wish it. He wanted to walk, to be alone, to recall, if it were possible, the fleeting impressions of this last half-hour; but his Excellency was not a man to run the risk of annoying, or whose eyes it would be well to turn towards what one might wish to remain unseen.

It was the memory of those two women that was with him as he stepped into the carriage, those two women who had both parted from him with a smile, and whose looks, words, and tones were both equally untranslatable. The one vaguely disturbed him with a consciousness that she saw and smiled over his trouble; the other, it seemed to him, was seen through such a cloud of passion that it left him

unable to judge what she meant or wished. When, just now, she had turned her head towards him and looked at him, her eyes dilating and softening under the passion in his, his pulses had quickened, he had been so conscious of his heart-beats, that he had with difficulty steadied himself sufficiently to speak to Miss Shore with reasonable calm. He knew it now; looking back, was able to realise the risk he had run and escaped, "But nevertheless, one day," he said to himself, "I know it, one day I shall lose control over myself, and shall go mad, and then——"

He was silent in his corner, so was his Excellency in his; the rain, which was now falling fast, splashed the puddles, the sky was dull and heavy,—it was all a type of the brooding pain which had hung over his life for so long. He started when the old man addressed him.

"This is a bad life," he said, "for a young man. It is treason to say so," with a light laugh, "but the life is narrow: there is scarcely any future possible to a man who needs something beyond a ball or a tea-party."

"It *is* treason," assented Prince Lescynski.

"But having faced that," went on his Excellency, "is there no possible way out of it? Now, take yourself and Shore, it is a very unsatisfactory life. I wonder almost," he added, meditatively, "that he did not join the English army."

"It is too late now. And for myself," he added

bitterly, a moment later, "any adoption is better than homelessness, and a Pole has no country."

"Marriage," observed the elder, quietly, "is the best way of creating a home—a country—if such be needed."

"It might be a dear bargain, sir."

"Every one—men especially are very apt to forget that to gain one thing means always to lose something else."

"True," Prince Lescynski assented, "in which case it is necessary to be very well aware of what we are giving up."

"And of what we are gaining."

The words were spoken so quietly that they seemed but of slight import; but after he had spoken them, the brilliant watching eyes in the darkened corner of the carriage regarded the other intently.

It seemed as if he were going to add something; but whilst he hesitated the carriage stopped, and a flash of light announced their arrival at the barracks.

"You will not come on with me?" and as Prince Lescynski declined, "then, *à tantôt*," he added, and pulled the rug about himself in the carriage. "It is so awkward," he said, with a smile in the solitude, "I believe I am as fond of him as if he were my son; a certain way of providing trouble for my old age, and, in addition, I can do no good. Ladies," with a little inclination of his head, "must have amusement provided for them, or they provide it for themselves,

and men are, of course, the amusement that nature has thoughtfully provided."

At these informal supper-parties after the theatre, etiquette was almost entirely laid aside. There were only eight guests to-night, and at the round table there were talk and laughter enough to banish the external evidences of the troubles that were assailing all present.

The two ladies had returned together, and during the short drive little had been said. The Princess at first had spoken feverishly, as if to banish the memory of the previous silence, and Virginia had dutifully replied. In the darkness the mocking light of the eyes, the curl of the lip, were alike hidden, and the voice sounded softer when these were invisible. On starting there had been a silence, and then the sound of her name, "Virginia," spoken quickly and breathlessly, and a momentary glimpse in the dimly lit carriage of flushed cheeks and restless blue eyes, then a movement as if to take her hand.

"What was coming?" The necessity for thought brought the capacity, "What confidence was she about to receive that she could wish to hear?"

Ignoring the movement, the word—

"Will his Excellency be there to-night?" Virginia questioned, turning her head slowly round. "Ah, of course. It is as well," with a smile, "we have nothing to hide when his eyes are on us."

“You think him so very keen-sighted?” There was a suspicion of emotion in the tones still.

“The keenness of his vision I take to be only equalled by the silence of his tongue. I am always wondering whose secrets he is discovering, whilst he is listening to my comments on the opera.”

There was an uneasy half-assent, and then they had reached the Palace.

And now in the room, with its soft shaded lamps, and its many beauties of art-pictures and books everywhere—a fernery opening out from it, where the melancholy splash of a fountain sounded—they were all gathered together whom these various differences sundered.

Of all present, though each one probably wore his coat over a troubled heart, it was only Prince Lescynski who showed any reflection of it in his face; but then he was a Pole, one of that excitable, passionate race whose history has been a fitting cradle in which to foster the national characteristics—the Irish of the Continent, but with far more than Ireland’s wrongs to avenge.

Perhaps he had unconsciously expected some explanation, some words to follow that look that had met his in the theatre. Men are still so ignorant of women, that what may be merely a momentary reflection from their own personality, will assume to them the proportions of a well-considered action. He had had these vague ideas all the way hither,

and now it was all just the same as it had been thousands of times before.

The lights and flowers, the tall palms in the corner, the portrait of the old man who had been this beautiful woman's husband, the corresponding portrait of the pretty serious-eyed boy, the soft green of the fernery, and the small well-known party.

The Princess herself, talking in the nervous way that had become habitual to her, her restless discontented eyes turning from one to another. A demure elderly lady who spoke little; Virginia Shore who spoke a great deal, her brother, and his Excellency. It was to this last he oftenest looked: through all the tumult of his mind those late speeches now and then found their way, with a suggestion that there was a key to them, could he but stop to find it. But only the vague instinct remained, that the words he had listened to had been kind.

He was seated between the Princess and Virginia, and though the disturbed state of his mind tended to prevent his thoughts wandering out of one groove, he was vaguely conscious that if the Princess was indifferent, Virginia was inclined to warfare. If the one had been different, the other could have been easily borne, and yet—and yet there had been a time, not so very long ago either, when Virginia's words had held a distinct attraction for him, when there had been but a very narrow step between where he stood and the wide sea of love.

He had not taken that other step : as he hesitated, he had become aware of another whose words and looks drew him with mightier power, and he had turned away and followed, and now, in addition, he had forgotten it had ever been otherwise. It was buried under last year's snows—or rather it was the snow of last year—and had melted so surely away that nothing remained to tell that it had ever been. It had merely prepared the ground for the new and stronger passion that had taken its place.

But women do not forget so easily, or at least not women like Virginia Shore. Perhaps the first faint stirrings of some great unguessed-at good had been the only intimation that the good had passed her by. There was no *fact* she could translate into words, but the result had given colour to her life.

Now, however, in the meantime, light remarks on the subjects of the hour were all that were possible.

“It is a charming opera,” she observed, “but M. Desprez grows older—it is time we heard his new one.”

“That is a hard saying, Miss Shore ; it reflects upon us all.”

“We do not, Excellency, defy truth by showing ourselves before the curtain,” she retorted.

“True, a strong light is apt to take truth's part, and impress our weaknesses on the beholder ; let us be wise and avoid it.”

“Which, Excellency, the light or the beholder ?”

She looked straight at him as she asked the question, a touch of amusement in her expression.

"It depends, I suppose, on which you fear most."

"*I* fear," she repeated ; "I fear neither."

"Neither the fact, nor the being found out?"

"Neither," she emphasised.

"Ah, but you are not a fair sample," he added. "You pride yourself on being above all our little weaknesses."

"And you," she retorted, "on seeing through them."

"In the Palace of Truth," interposed Captain Shore, with a suggestion of a smile, "was it necessary for every one to make a note of his neighbour's shortcomings directly he observed them?"

This question was addressed to his sister, who smiled back.

"It must have added fresh horror to the place, if such were the case. It would not tend, would it, Excellency, to social intercourse? Supposing now," with a little smile, which rested for a moment in turn on all those present, "that we were all constrained to say aloud the uppermost thought, possibly we should not like it."

"You are a cynic," Jerome replied, "and possibly judge of others by yourself. Out comes my uppermost thought at once. Joy, unutterable gratitude, that at this moment I am here, instead of where I expected to be this evening, in the train on the way to Neuheim."

"It is evident, Jerome, *you* would not be embarrassed in the Palace of Truth, where most of us would cry out for the rocks to cover us."

"Thank you, Captain Shore," the Princess smiled, she had been very silent hitherto, "I am glad truth is sometimes pleasant."

"And politic," murmured his Excellency, "and that is not usual, is it? So unusual that we have passed over Miss Shore's striking metaphor; a palace where rocks are to be expected to fall upon us, is a most uncomfortable idea. And I was going to say, 'Try me.' I will not be outdone in the matter of confession."

"No, no—too late," she answered, "you have had time to think. Let us question Prince Lescynski instead."

The slightest possible red for a moment flushed his dark cheek, as Miss Shore thus unexpectedly addressed him, and his look so thoroughly betrayed his unconsciousness of the conversation, that there was perhaps a fair excuse for the girl's malicious little smile, and the expectant silence with which she emphasised his embarrassment.

But in a moment he had an ally, and those to whom his Excellency lent a helping hand had always secured an ally of value.

"Did you never hear, Miss Shore, that a woman's impressions should be taken before reflection, and a man's after,—if the truth be really desired? It is your loss, therefore, not to give me a chance. Per-

haps though, after all, your metaphor was not so inaccurate."

For a moment she looked away from Prince Lescynski, straight into his Excellency's eyes.

"You mean?"

"Only that there are rocks to be feared—when they fall."

"In palaces, Excellency," she corrected, swiftly. "Quote me all in all, or quote me not at all."

At that moment the Princess rose with some sudden word to Prince Lescynski, and turned with him towards the conservatory, which opened out of the room, and the two speakers rising also, still faced each other as if both expected a last word. But it did not come. Perhaps they each recognised a case in which victory would rest with the last speaker, which now hovered between them.

There were shaded lamps in the conservatory, the air was heavy with rich scents, the bright colouring was dull and indistinct in the half light. Sleepy little birds stirred uneasily amid the greenery, as the two passers disturbed their slumbers—twittered a little, drew nearer to each other, ruffled their soft plumage, and then settled down once more to sleep.

"My roses are fading," the woman said, and, stretching out her hand, drew towards her a lovely creamy blossom above her head.

Prince Lescynski bent it nearer, and then broke it off; she took it from his hand, and replaced with

its freshness the fading crimson buds in the lace of her dress, saying nothing, apparently unheeding of the fact that the fading buds remained in the giver's hand.

"You wear a strange ring, Prince."

In gathering the flowers his hand for a moment was lighted by a lamp overhead, a slender, brown, nervous hand. In the shaded light he reddened a little, hesitated as if in doubt, then drew it off and held it towards her.

"It is a reminder, if such be needed, of a tragedy."

She took it and held it towards the light, a narrow iron band.

"A tragedy?" she repeated inquiringly, and as she spoke she slipped it on to her white hand, where the diamonds and sapphires sparkled.

"Such a ring is worn by the men of our family," he said, "to keep fresh in their memories how much has to be avenged, if the day should ever come."

"And it means?" she questioned, a shadow of his gravity on her face.

"It means that it was forged from the iron fetters of those whose fate it was to be exiled to Siberia."

She shuddered ever so slightly, perhaps at the look in the dark face, which had grown stern and hard, perhaps at the realisation of what the words meant.

"We are not a lucky race," he added, with a little bitter laugh; "we have always known poverty and exile. Death and disaster are always on the look-

out for us ; we are neither lucky at cards—nor in love.”

His eyes looked straight into hers—blue as sea-waves—as he spoke ; hers shifted a little uneasily from his face to the roses above her head, to the flower at her breast, to the ring upon her hand ; with a quick movement she drew it off.

“It is as well,” she said, speaking quickly, as if to hide a little nervousness, “to try and forget tragedies, not to remember them. Do the ladies of your family wear it as well ?” holding it out as she spoke.

“No,” he almost smiled ; “a reminder must be made ornamental, for a woman to be willing to carry it about with her. They would long ago have had the iron gilt.”

“You are bitter, Prince. It would be better, I think,” as he took the ring, “to put this away and forget its story.”

“Not after to-night,” he answered, low. “It has now another story.” His dark eyes glanced significantly from her hand to the iron circlet, “The one memory may serve to soften the other.”

She made no reply. There were voices and footsteps audible ; when she spoke, it was not to her companion.

“Excellency, you are a lover of roses, are you not ? Let me show you mine ; they are a triumph.”

“A triumph of what may be accomplished in captivity,” he amended, as he moved to her side ; “what

might not have been expected had they been left free?"

She looked as if she scarcely understood—perhaps was only inattentive. A slight stereotyped smile on her lips, her eyes wandering from the speaker to where the other two stood, a few paces apart, conversing. A moment thus, and then without an answer she moved away and joined them.

"The mystic ring," Virginia said, as they drew near, "is not in its place. Here is a chance of learning its history." She smiled as she glanced towards it, and Prince Lescynski became aware, if he had previously forgotten, that he had not replaced it, but still held it in his hand.

"There is little mystery," he replied, recovering himself; but his listener's quick eyes noted, as she bent nearer to examine it, that he did not offer it to her, but slipped it back first into its accustomed place. Perhaps he feared that the iron band would show its sombre significant reminder on the white ringless hand, as it had but now done amid the diamonds and sapphires of the Princess.

Anyway, no such chance was given. He held out his hand, and Virginia leaned over it to note it.

"Truly, now, is it not a charm against the evil eye?" she questioned; "there is a date, I cannot read it."

"18th March 1863."

He spoke quietly, but his eyes were excited; the thrill of his excitement was felt by all three listeners.

“It is a date that no one knows, why should they?” His eyes turned from the one woman to the other; it was to the sea-blue eyes and golden hair his words were given. “It was nothing; scarcely an echo of such an event would be heard in European history. A few miserable unhappy Poles suspected, or found guilty—it was all the same—hurried away in the silence of the night to undertake that journey from which, like death itself, there is no return. Husband and wife, brother and sister, mother and son, heart-rending partings; imagine the bitterness of death without its following peace, and you have the story of that night. Amongst the miserable little band of prisoners, one—little more than a boy in years—was taken, leaving a few months’ bride to bear the future as best she could.

“She did what was possible.” His voice was no longer calm; his eyes, darkened with passion, gave a glimpse of the storm his words had awakened. “Some little time later, with an infant in her arms, she made her way to St Petersburg, and eventually into the presence of the Emperor.

“There, her pleadings availed; compassion was felt for the younger son of a misguided house, who had followed in the steps of those older than himself.

“Only twenty; he should have a chance, partly for the sake of the beautiful seventeen-years-old wife, and so the pardon was granted.

“Penniless, friendless, and with all those he loved,

and whose teaching possibly had led him astray, out *there*—mercy might safely be indulged in.

“Little did the wife reckon of all this when the precious paper was hers.

“Hope and Love were once more within sight, only, you see, unfortunately, it was all of no use, because when the Imperial will was made known, it availed little. Prince Adrian Lescynski was dead.”

With the sudden silence there was a stir through the little audience, as if, the spell broken, they were glad to escape from its influence.

She to whom he had told his story never moved till he had finished; on her expressive face there was almost as much emotion as on that of the speaker, and then: “It is too terrible,” she said, “and your mother, Prince?”

“She died,” he answered; and then added, “some people are so fortunate as to die when they have nothing particularly to live for.”

The words were too bitter, too significant to be ignored, and yet they were evidently difficult to comment on; for it was his Excellency who said, “The difficulty is, you see, to decide when that *when* has arrived. In such a kaleidoscope as life, there is always a chance of a fresh combination.”

“True,” the Princess said, and turned towards the lighted room, as if fearing to betray the emotion that evidently distressed her.

“True,” Virginia said also; “and yet, Prince, it is a remarkable fact, is it not, how many wrong com-

binations are possible before one gets the right one ? ”

“ The right one, Miss Shore, is impossible.”

“ That sounds like a sigh,” she answered, “ and you are not a man I should have expected to sigh over anything. But after all,” she added, slowly, “ a sigh may be a sort of emotional pleasure.”

He looked at her as if barely comprehending, and yet realising she meant something. “ I don’t think we see things, or ever could, perhaps, from the same point of view.”

“ It is generally conceded,” she smiled, “ that men and women view things differently. *Et après.*”

She was standing in that easy upright way that was habitual to her, the large fan she held sent around soft waves of air ; she looked towards him for the next word, but it did not come.

He was looking through the open door into the well-lit room beyond, where the Princess stood talking to Captain Shore.

She did not move, but into her eyes, following the direction of his, came that hard look that characterised them on occasions ; but the regular waves of the fan went on the same—stirring the air, mixing with the soft tinkle of the fountain, the little uncertain movements of the sleepy birds.

“ I suppose,” lowering her voice, which yet was clear and distinct as ever, “ that remarriage is an open secret.”

“ What do you mean ? ”

In the swift transition, the sudden turn of his head, the inflection of his voice, there was no mistaking what he felt. The knife had gone straight home. His very lips were white as he turned towards her.

"It is not true," he said, passionately. "What makes you say such things?"

"One may whisper gossip about princesses," she said, quietly, "but it is safer not to say it very loud."

"I beg your pardon," he began, "but you startled me. I have never even heard a word of such a rumour. It cannot be true."

"Why not?" she queried, coldly. "Young, beautiful—what is there more likely? My only wonder," with a slight shrug of her shoulders, "is that his Excellency has managed to prevent it for so long."

"And he has failed?"

"My dear Prince, go to some one else for scandal, only gossip is to be had from me. I never repeat what I do not find every one else knows,—that is the reason that I succeed so well in keeping clear of disaster." She smiled again, and turned towards the room; he followed, though he was barely conscious of the fact.

Perhaps the pain and passion that possessed him had been the gradual growth of the evening, but this last word had let loose the demons that were fighting for the mastery.

“It was true, true!” Those were the words surging in his brain—

“I never repeat except that which every one knows.”

Doubtless to every one except himself the rumour had come, and he alone, blind and self-absorbed, had remained ignorant. But he would know now. Let the space between them be what it might, by the power of his own suffering, he would force the acknowledgment from her, would let her know. And then he was back in the brilliant room, the torrent of thought checked by the strong force of custom. Etiquette obliging, almost unconsciously, its tribute, and almost unconsciously granting it.

The Princess was saying “Good night”; she looked tired, and her eyes passed from one to the other, as if she half expected to see or guess something unusual from the expression of those around.

His Excellency even looked a little disturbed and unlike his usual self, Virginia Shore alone bore no trace of the storm that was in the air. She stood by the side of the Princess whilst the gentlemen bowed their “Good nights,” and to Prince Leszynski’s excited fancy, it seemed there was a mocking light in her eyes, a mocking smile on her lips, as if she read the storm raging under the enforced calm, and was amused at it.

“I will join you in a moment,” Captain Shore said; “I am only going to fetch a book from my sister’s room, and then I will walk home with you.”

He disappeared, and the other two men descended the wide shallow staircase together.

"They are very unlike," the elder man said, with a glance in the direction whence Jerome Shore had disappeared. "The brother and sister, I mean. He is so natural in some ways—so boyish; and she"—he laughed a little—"is a consummate actress."

"No, Excellency, she is worse," Prince Lescynski answered quickly; "she is a cold amused spectator."

His Excellency looked into the speaker's face, something of sympathy in his keen eyes, though there was none in his voice. "Women have a knack of uniting the two: the one affords them excitement and the other amusement. Drive back with me," he added, "it is raining in torrents."

"No, thanks, Excellency; I don't feel in a humour to escape the rain." But after the elder man had got into his brougham, and was on the point of driving away, he approached hastily, bareheaded in the pouring rain.

"Tell me," he began, and then almost immediately checked himself. "I beg your pardon; no, no, nothing," as the footman hesitated, and his Excellency leaned towards him, and without another word he turned back, standing a moment in the blaze of light at the door, in which the rain-drops shone clear upon his dark head.

CHAPTER VII.

“Yesterday, this day’s madness did prepare.”

LEFT to herself at length, the Princess gave a sigh of relief. It was distinct relief to escape those keen eyes, which she felt read her so well, yet which never gave a sign of what they read; and yet, deep down in her heart, she did not fear them as she did those of the brown-haired girl, with whom she had been as intimate as with a sister ever since she had left her home. His Excellency’s eyes were sharp—nothing escaped them; but his judgment was that of one with whom mercy might hold the scales, even lay a finger’s-weight in the balance; but with the woman it would not be so, or so the Princess imagined, and trembled under the thought. The rumour, no lighter than a summer breeze, that floated about and whispered this friendship was rooted in fear, not love, was not foundationless.

But Princess Elvira was no analyst; she only felt that life was hard and difficult, that all about her were invisible chains which fretted and galled, and

that his Excellency was always at hand, for fear she should do something unwise, though his quiet detaining hand had not half the power of the dread of Virginia's mocking smiles.

She reddened now at the thought of them—could see them—imagine the words that would accompany them, should she ever—— Ever do what!

She started, lifting her head with a proud impatient movement, and turning away from the light, walked hurriedly into the conservatory.

Perhaps of all the troubled hearts that beat that night, looking vainly round for comfort, there was none stood more in need of it than hers.

A woman, proud, passionate, and ambitious—a life in which discipline was unknown, and ill-regulated inclinations the only counsellors—what would be her case in the hour of need!

She was standing now where she had stood earlier in the evening, by the flowering creamy roses. Their scent was heavy round her; it was so still that it almost seemed as if she were listening yet to the voice that had spoken here, saw once again the hand lifted, on which was visible the dark ring. A moment thus with bent head, whilst fancy held its own, then a slight stir, and she looked up to see standing close beside her, in the half darkness, the man of whom she had been thinking.

For a moment so disturbed was her mind between fancy and reality, that she scarcely understood all

that his presence signified, then he was speaking, moving a step nearer as he did so.

"Yes, it is I—I have gone mad—have waited till you were alone, and have come back to speak to you."

For a moment it seemed as if his words were literally true, and she shrank a step back, and was conscious of physical fear. But only for a moment, then she recognised it was not a madness of which she need be afraid, and she drew herself up, lifting her head with a haughty little gesture, and, ignoring him altogether, would have passed him by.

"After all, conduct such as this—an insult such as this"—so the words framed themselves in her brain—"would speedily be atoned for."

She was not alone, though for the first minute it had seemed as if the world only held her and this man.

But when she had made that step, he did not move aside.

"Listen!" he cried, passionately; "do you think I have risked all I have done to be put aside with a look? You think I do not know what it means, but I do! I tell you I am mad—so I am; but not mad enough not to foresee to-morrow, only—I don't care! There is but one thing in the world for me——"

She did not attempt to move again. She stood quite still—a statue of a woman, if it had not been for some lurking danger in her eyes, which waited,

waited; and it would be hard to foretell what it would do when aroused, what especial form it would take. But it behoved a man to be wary in awaking it.

“I love you,” he said, his voice low and vibrating. “You shall hear me, though all the rights and wrongs of the world stood between us. You know it, you have no doubts; but how I love you, this night’s work shows you. Everything, as the world counts, lies between us: it rests with you to do as you will; but if death had stood by your side, awaiting me here, I should not have hesitated—you should have heard me say it.”

He paused, stooped his head a little, his dark passionate eyes looking into hers. “Now, I have thrown my all, what have you to say?”

Quick into her face came that flash that had been lying in wait; her eyes were like steel.

“Nothing!”

Her voice was low, but it had lost its usual lingering tones, and was full and swift.

“Insulted under my own roof, within reach almost of my sleeping child, do you expect me to exchange words with the man who has insulted me?”

At the words he turned whiter. “It is for you to say what you will; you know best if your own heart believes your words. You are a free woman. It is not God, but man, who stands between us. No, do not fear,” as she shrank a step away from him; “my *words*,” with a slight emphasis, “are all you

have to fear. Unsay what you have said," he added a moment later, as she gave no sign; "see, on my knees," throwing himself down before her—"on my knees, I pray of you take them back."

"It is not *fear* I feel," she said, slowly and defiantly. That was her only answer.

The way was clear now; he did not even attempt to detain her, or prevent her passing him. With unhurried step she moved, though under her eyes there was a line of unusual colour, and the pulsations of her heart were almost pain, until she was within the room, when she paused, and as she did so, she was aware that he had followed her, that he was once more standing between her and possible help. He looked haggard and miserable in the shaded lights of the room; she did not speak, but waited, almost as if expectantly.

"I know my fate," he said, and as he spoke he rested his slender hand with its iron badge on the table by him. "You have taken no pains to prevent my foreseeing it, why should you! We are an unlucky race, as I said once before to-night,—lucky in nothing," with a slight emphasis, "but we never keep back anything. For those we love,"—there was a momentary hesitation,—“and for those we hate, we grudge nothing—we have no reserve. There was not, perhaps, much to risk; but it was all risked to-night, and lost.”

To leave the room she would have had to pass him, perhaps she feared some attempt to detain her;

she never moved, but whilst he was speaking, she lifted her head and spoke: it was as if the wild spirit that had prompted his words had passed from him into her.

"Lost, lost everything, indeed," she cried. "You shall learn that I am not alone, that I have friends to protect me, and," her voice trembling, so that the words scarcely reached him, "to avenge me."

Silence, and then he took a few hurried steps nearer; the calm he had regained was gone, his voice once more was stirred with passion.

"You are not as hard and cruel as you try to appear," he cried; "your eyes are truer than your lips, but that avails little. Your words and your silence have alike set worlds between us. Tomorrow's banishment means only exile from your presence: I risked that, it was part of my all, and I take nothing away." Another silence, and then he slowly added, "Not even my sword."

There was some sudden movement, some swift change of tone, and then the gleam of steel, a sharp noise, and a broken weapon lying at her feet.

It was almost as if the blue gleam of the finely tempered steel was reflected in her eyes, as with head still proudly lifted, arms folded, she met those dark vivid ones opposite: then his voice again—

"Not even my sword! it was vowed to your service, and if you do not need it, or will not accept it, it shall never serve another."

She was alone now: the voice had ceased, the

passionate eyes had disappeared ; she was alone, with the broken sword lying on the soft carpet at her feet.

When the door had closed, she moved ; no gently animated statue, but a living, breathing, angry woman.

“ Insulted ! ” that was the one word that answered all the rush of voices crying aloud. She who had never known a master, but the wish or fancy of the moment, to have stood, as she could remember now, listening to the ravings of a madman.

Her eyes were no longer restless and dissatisfied, they were vivid and blue as steel ; the colour came and went in her delicate cheeks like a swift flame.

A moment later she drew pen and ink towards her, and scarcely seeing the paper, hardly realising what she wrote, penned a letter to his Excellency.

“ Come as soon as possible to-morrow.

“ I have been insulted most cruelly since you left, by Prince Lescynski. He returned here after you had gone, and for half an hour I have had to listen to his ravings. He must not remain another day. Willingly, or unwillingly, he must go, so that I never see him again. Settle it as you will, I cannot think what is best.”

When the servant came in answer to the bell, “ I wish his Excellency to have that note the first thing in the morning,” she said ; and when it had gone, and she knew that there was no possibility of its being recalled, there was for a moment an almost

faint shadowy wish that silence, eternal silence, might have settled over this night; silence and forgetfulness, except in the memories of those two for whom no forgetfulness would be possible.

The gentle suggestion stole over her, calming and soothing the passion that had but now shaken her soul, and then in a moment it was gone, banished by a thousand demons all crying aloud.

"Share a secret with him! Let him go with the knowledge, at any moment to be blazoned abroad, of the words he had forced her to hear—the love-words with which this room still rang. Never, never!"

This was the note that his Excellency received the following morning. It needed no subtle translator to interpret it. Each word, stamped with the feelings of the moment, bore impress of the writer's mood. It scarcely needed the hastily scrawled lines, signed "Lescynski," asking for an interview, which came almost at the same moment, to further explain it.

"Ask Prince Lescynski in here," he said to the servant, and sighed.

There is an age at which to be harassed early in the morning is a certain evil. Our digestions, like our feelings, are apt to rebel as we grow older, at any stress of work.

"I knew," he thought, as he looked round to welcome his visitor, "that I was growing fond of him, and that the inevitable result was sure to follow—that he would shortly make me uncomfortable."

But he was aware of his momentary annoyance

vanishing at the sight of the worn haggard face. There was more cordiality in his voice than he had himself expected to hear, as he asked his visitor to sit down. "Have some coffee? You look cold and tired. We can talk afterwards," as Dorislaus began some explanatory words.

"No, no," the other replied quickly, pushing aside the proffered cup. "No, I am not hungry nor thirsty either. I want to speak to you."

It was with another sigh his Excellency resigned himself.

To be asked to sympathise with misfortune, or be lenient to follies thus early in the morning, is as bad as to be expected to sparkle at breakfast; his Excellency was keenly conscious of this, but he only allowed himself that one sigh of vain remonstrance, and gave himself up to listen.

"Mad," Dorislaus finished, after a long sketch of the previous night, "of course; but having been so, there is no use trying to go back."

"And if mad," his Excellency retorted, "there is no use trying to persuade people afterwards that you have returned to sanity. You must expect to be treated as if you were always dangerous. The pity is," he went on, after a moment, as there was no comment on his words, "that you did not let your friends know that you expected the attack. A madman is so much safer in an asylum."

"Help me, Excellency, don't jeer at me; I assure you I am sane enough now—tell me what I am to do."

His eyes were bent on the ground, he did not look up as he spoke ; there was something so foreign to the usually trim soldierly neatness in his wet uniform, his worn aspect, and miserable eyes, that the remark, whatever it may have been, that rose to his hearer's lips was checked. He rose, pushing aside his coffee, and with a turn up and down the room in silence, finally paused by the younger man's side.

"I have no help, and little advice to offer," he said, and as he spoke he laid his hand lightly on the man's shoulder. "You must go, and at once ; I have no choice. I have heard," then changing his sentence ; "I had a letter from the Princess this morning." He paused again, was perhaps aware of the slight responsive tremble at the name, lifted his hand from its resting-place, and took another turn in the room.

After that later hesitation, and at the subsequent silence, Prince Lescynski questioned slowly, not looking up, "What does she wish ?"

"She wishes you to go at once."

"She is very angry ?"

There was another faintest note of interrogation in the apparent assent, or so his Excellency interpreted it, for he stood still, and "She is very angry," he repeated. Another silence, and then, "I am going to her shortly ; she has sent for me. I can tell her that you are leaving — have left—— It is best. For me this is not farewell. We shall meet again — I will write to you — but for the moment it is best."

The young man rose now, and there was something like tears in his eyes—a suspicion of a tremble in his voice. These violent passionate natures respond so swiftly to any emotion.

“You give me an easy dismissal, Excellency; it was not, I fear, what you were meant to do. Well,” as the old man took his hand, “my folly has cost me dear. To a homeless, friendless foreigner your friendship and kindness have been so much, that it is hard to part from them.”

“I never preach if I can help it, or upbraid, or do anything that the wisdom of the ancients has declared to be folly; so I say nothing of what is done. But I am too old to make fresh friends, so I must look forward to seeing you again; in the meantime, God be with you. Ask for leave, I will arrange it, and write to-night and tell me where you go.”

He walked to the door with him, his hand on the young man's arm, and then paused a moment, as if about to add something, but apparently faltered in his intention, or found the appropriate wording difficult, for it was with a silent hand-shake they parted.

Once more alone, he drew pen and ink towards him, and wrote a note on the subject of Prince Lesceynski's leave, and having sealed and sent it, started for the Palace.

He was at once admitted into the Princess's sitting-room, the same room in which the incidents of last night had occurred, and there was not much to

hope, he realised at once, at sight of the well-known face.

“ You have come. Sit down, Excellency. I wish for your advice.”

But for a moment she did not speak ; it was almost as if she scarcely knew how to begin.

“ You had my note,” she began hurriedly, and the colour flushed into her cheeks as she spoke. “ He has gone ? ”

“ He has gone.”

“ And will not return ? ” she added, quickly.

“ That is as your Highness wishes—of course.”

“ As I wish ? ” she repeated. “ What else is there possible to wish ? You know all—that he returned here when I was alone. It was cruel, insulting.”

“ Insulting ? ” The comment, so slow and calm, checked the quick torrent of her speech, but only for a second.

“ His presence at such a time, in such a manner, was an insult.”

“ True, Princess. A man who takes advantage of a woman’s weakness, to force her to listen to words she does not wish to hear, whatever their respective positions may be, is deserving of no pity.”

“ All that I ask now is, that I may never see him again. Do not let it be known—let it rest between you and me,—provided always that nothing arises to remind me of the most humiliating moment of my life.”

Though she spoke with the rapidity of passion, at

the end of the sentence she gave a little breathless pause, and looked with a certain defiance at her listener. Silent for a moment, while his keen eyes noted the defiance slowly die out, the vivid flush deepen, the restless discontented eyes almost unconsciously soften, then, as if aware of the change, nervously meet his own, as if to guess therein if they had betrayed aught.

"Princess," he then said, leaning forward in his chair, his voice growing more earnest, "I have known you so many years—your husband and his mother were very dear to me—for their sakes, as well as for your own, I should wish my advice to be worthy of your following."

"Give it," she said; there was a ring almost of impatience in her voice. "I have listened to you always—I believe you wish me well; but," breaking off, "What is there to advise? Granted he leaves the country, that no reminder is possible of what I have endured, there is nothing more,—the matter is at an end."

"If you were my daughter"—it was scarcely as if his words were an answer to hers, perhaps he was following some train of thought of his own—"if you were my daughter, I should wish you to be happy."

"Happy?" she repeated; she spoke more quietly, her looks and tones were alike more composed. "The first lesson I received was, that I was never to allow any such thought to arise."

"Happiness and ambition," the old man slowly

said, "mean treading different paths, and that necessitates different results."

She again flushed slightly, and it was after a moment she said, "You answer yourself, Excellency, they are different roads."

"True, but there are moments when it is possible to abandon the one for the other."

She did not comment on his speech, but led the talk into other channels, and shortly afterwards he drove homewards.

"She understood," he thought, "but she will never entertain the idea of any future which would deprive her of the shadowy authority she possesses.

"An angry woman," he thought, as he drove homewards to see what could be done towards settling the matter with as little talk as possible; but he did not get farther, the train of ideas being diverted by the sight of Captain Shore, not in uniform, on his way to the station. A few minutes later he had overtaken and stopped him.

"You are going away?" he questioned.

"I have twenty-four hours' leave," the other returned, evidently embarrassed.

"And you are going to Neuheim," his Excellency continued. "Yes, I suppose so," as the other assented.

"Tell your friend it would be as well not to stay there over to-morrow, that I am writing to Paris."

He was turning away, when, observing something

in Captain Shore's face, he added, "It is best for him that he should disappear, and wisest that it should be quietly. That is the best advice that a friend can give him."

"But, Excellency, it means so much: it is his career—everything."

"It is easier to advise, Captain Shore, when we can choose the factors, and foretell the results; but when we only have to prescribe for results, advice is rarely pleasant."

"Yes," the other assented, but half unwillingly; "you would, I am sure, know what is best."

"Under the circumstances, of course, understood. To go back, you know, is always impossible; but out of the fresh combinations you may strive for fresh results."

"An angry woman," he said again that evening, as, after a solitary dinner, he sat down to write to Dorislaus Lescynski. Said it aloud and emphatically this time; but again did not conclude his sentence, though this time the sudden check was not from any outward circumstance.

It took him a little time and reflection before he began his letter, and he was a long time writing it, though it was short; and when it was finished he had half a mind to throw it into the fire, and try again; but finally decided to post it as it was.

"MY DEAR DORISLAUS,—I have given much thought to your affairs during the day, but have

no other advice to offer, except that you should send in your resignation, which will be accepted.

“To return is impossible. I make no comment on these words. If any other exit from a difficult position were possible I would tell you, but I see none. You perhaps deceive yourself by hoping it may be otherwise, or perhaps fail to see what is best; life is often complex when studying it in our own person, and very clear when we are merely looking on from the outside, in which case we see results, not causes, and it is results we have to deal with. As I told you, I have passed the days of my youth, and have arrived at the judicial age, so offer no comments on actions of which you have to bear the consequences; only of this I am assured, consequences are much graver than causes, and mistakes much more often punished than crimes, in which sentence you should discover both sources of anxiety and of consolation.

“I can say little more: in the course of the spring I shall go to Paris, and by that time shall hope to hear you have formed some plan for your future. You are young; believe an old man, that in activity and resolution there is an escape from, or modification of, nearly all the ills of life. And I am not speaking to one without resource; you are strong, all you have to learn is to apply your strength. Still, the great thing is to possess it; it is the great want in a weak, undisciplined age, in which to want a thing seems to be

sufficient reason for having it, whereas the want and the denial is often the union that forges character. And the secret of how we live is found not in circumstance, but in character. There are a set of copybook platitudes, which, if I had a son, I should send to him, in the belief he would write them on the tablets of his heart, and profit from their perusal. As you are not my son, I see more clearly how useless the experience of the old is to save the young. I only hope and pray you will interpret them as a sign of affection from

“ERNEST VON REICHHOFEN.”

CHAPTER VIII.

“Events are only combinations out of people’s own characters, thoughts, and wishes.”

THE evening of the day that saw so much unaccustomed excitement in the Palace was that of the usual weekly reception, and as she prepared for it, the mind of Virginia Shore was filled with speculations as to what was to succeed the drama that had been enacted. Had last night been the first act or the third, she wondered—was it all over, or just about to begin?

In her own troubles, as in those of others, she would always have found a flavour of excitement, which would have tended to set the trouble on a stage; or, perhaps, it would be more true to say that with such a woman there is an unexplained something, which deprives trouble of some pang. Where the brain criticises and speculates on everything before it reaches the heart, there may be less pain when it reaches the more vulnerable spot. In the morning, as she sat in the window idling over some needlework, wondering the while what effect her

words might have had on Dorislaus Lescynski's passionate nature, she had received an unexpected visit from her brother.

"No, I cannot stay," as she uttered her surprise, and questioned him as to what he was about to do. "I am going to Neuheim shortly. I have only hurried in to tell you."

"To Neuheim," she repeated, wonderingly.

"Yes. Virginia." He paused, glanced round to make sure they were alone, and even then lowered his voice when he spoke. "Have you heard? Have you seen *her*? No. Well, you will hear it all soon enough, no doubt. *He*," with a slight stress on the pronoun, "made just the fool of himself last night that I expected,—and, well, of course, the end has come."

No need to emphasise or add names, even Virginia for the moment was stirred out of her usual calm.

"Last night, Jerome," she repeated, incredulously, her thoughts glancing back to the evening; "but impossible!"

"You may well say so. He went back after we had left, got in, found her alone, and now," gloomily, "of course, there is nothing more to add. He is at Neuheim. I have a day's leave, and am going to see him."

As he spoke, the red slowly faded from Virginia's cheeks, until she was colourless; no need for her to ask explanations, her quick brain enlarged and fitted out Jerome's few words, until the whole story, with

all its possible consequences, was clear to her mental vision. She had never foreseen this. Habit, custom is so strong, that the idea of his taking the position in such masterful manner, and demanding a settlement of it, had never occurred to her. Her taunt of the previous night had probably been in part to blame: it had been founded on fact; the idea of remarriage was one of common enough gossip, and one day, she had little doubt, would prove a reality. That it should have had such disastrous effects she was unprepared for.

A passing stab, that was what she had intended—a stab that should repay those unanswered words of the afternoon; but that they should have given him strength to strike the blow which probably would set him free from everything—love and pain alike—was not what she had premeditated. But the after-results of a sharp stroke are not to be foretold. With different people consequences are apt to be so very different. As long as constitutions vary, so will consequences.

But even whilst Jerome was speaking, she had steadied herself, and reviewed all the wide area of possibilities; and clearest of all stood out one which, even as she looked, passed out of that category. He would not return. It was the first thought, the clearest, the one from which almost unconsciously she shrank, and recognising the shrinking, turned and faced it; there was no lack of courage, either physical or mental, in Virginia Shore.

“It was a daring stroke,” she said aloud, whilst her surroundings ceased to sway, and Jerome looked towards her for a comment on his words; “but she is not a woman to be won in such a way.”

“You think she does not care for him? Of course”—a scarcely perceptible hesitation—“she does not.”

“My dear Jerome,” with a little mocking laugh, “what a boy you are, notwithstanding all your experience, at least facilities for experience! Care! Why, they would *both* laugh at you. Ambition on his side prompting him to a rich marriage; ambition on hers denying its advantages. Love!” a trifle bitterly, “it requires a healthier atmosphere than that of a Court for it to grow in. And that reminds me”—she was quite herself again—“you will not forget my tea to-morrow. Tea and music and Miss Traherne, the little English girl from M. Desprez. Mind you are back in time.”

He looked at her in the way a man does look at a woman who meets his earnestness with trifling, when he is not in a position to do more than wonder.

Judged and condemned in the swift facile way in which men do judge and condemn, women were slight creatures who felt little, whom the greater facts of life passed by. He sighed over her want of comprehension, which set a gap between him and one whom he honestly admired and loved; but she was a woman, therefore incapable of judging of a case on its merits—had probably already discussed

it with the Princess, and accepted her view of it, presented, of course, from a prejudiced standpoint. Possibly she was correct in her estimate of the Princess's feelings, as to the man's she was not in a position to judge, whereas he knew. And so, with a promise that he would be back the following afternoon, he kissed and left her without another word.

Left to herself, Virginia did not move for fully a quarter of an hour; she remained standing, looking forth with unseeing eyes across the fading glories of the autumn garden, where the leaves burnt red and golden, to the distant waters of the lake. For the moment it was as if the solid ground had been cut from beneath her feet, and it required concentration of thought to realise the fresh surroundings.

But with the suppleness of vision and accuracy of detail that distinguished her, she had ere long realised the new battle-field, and was prepared to do combat therein.

The chief sensation was gratitude to Jerome for enlightening her as to the situation, for it was extremely probable that otherwise she would never have known the exact truth; now she knew, and so armed, was not likely to make a mistake, or at least far less likely. But when she had stood for a moment before the mirror, and had looked with momentary unusual earnestness at her graceful figure, in a soft clinging gown of grass-green silk, with glittering dragon-flies in her bright hair, there

was an expression in the eyes, a cold mocking light, which boded ill to that other woman, whose heart even now was conscious of a nervous anxious thrill at the thought of it.

For Princess Elvira was also preparing for the evening with an unaccustomed sense of approaching ill.

She was not a sensitive woman, and was scarcely in the position to have acquired much thought of or for others, which might not be instinctive; but in these twenty-four hours she had gone through a great deal of mental emotion, and, as is the way with the generality of women, the emotion had been borne by an enforced accumulation of nervous energy which had to find its escape somehow,—an inconvenient law of nature, which many have found who have to live with those to whom such accumulation is necessary to meet the smallest ills of life. The choice of vent more generally lying between a great storm and constant shifting winds of irritation, but to Princess Elvira both means of escape were alike difficult. The way was too smooth for storm, and irritation exhibited towards those to whom it was a matter of indifference was small relief.

So all day the evil had increased; now it took the form of angry helpless rage, such as had assailed her the previous night; now the anger died away, and she was in fancy smiling back at Dorislaus Lescynski amid the roses of the conservatory; now

shrinking away from the passion in his dark eyes. Up and down the room she had paced feverishly most of the day, sometimes possessed with a wild longing to send for his Excellency and beg of him to help her. "Help her to what! who could help her?" she started at her own thoughts. Almost unconsciously she had wandered through the open door into the fernery, and was standing again where she had stood the previous night, listening to the story of his sorrows and his wrongs.

"We are an unlucky race—unlucky in love as well as in everything else."

She lifted her hand, and in memory saw the iron band where it had rested amid her sapphires and diamonds—just for a moment—as just for a moment the shadow of his darkening life had overwhelmed her brilliant one. She did not think it all out, and picture herself in this position or in that, as Virginia Shore would have done. No, her thoughts ran on madly for a few minutes, like a rebellious horse escaped from its master, to be caught and violently checked, finally hurried away from, as if she knew or feared where they would lead her.

She had not recalled her past for a long time; it was very seldom she did think of it. She was a woman essentially of the present moment; but as she paced the room this long endless day, now and again her thoughts escaped and flew back to her brief girlhood, almost briefer wifehood, and then across these later lonely years.

A handsome girl just freed from convent restrictions, no mother, and a father to whom life and its pleasures were dearer than was his daughter.

A father whose income was very far below his needs and position, and to whom this handsome daughter was a winning card, that Fate had dealt him late in life. Then the marriage to the elderly grey-bearded man; the marriage, whose brilliance had been echoed on all sides until she herself had recognised it, and the strong-willed, undisciplined nature had suddenly, even before recognising its needs, learnt the lesson that there was but one legitimate outlet for such power and passion as she possessed—ambition.

“Conquer your own world,” her father said, “and you have achieved such happiness as is possible; personal happiness for such as us is rarely possible, but substitutes are easily found.” And in all the years since, she had been satisfied to believe it was so.

He who had taught her the doctrine was dead, as was also the husband who had lifted her above her fellows, and she was left in her youth and beauty to make with such factors what she could of life. They were much, she had always felt—everything, she had thought, until these late months; but now it sometimes seemed to her as if some cruel voice were always near, ready to whisper what it was that had cast that shadow of discontented restlessness into her sea-blue eyes—what was the need that, if she so willed, might fill her life with interest.

And she did not want to know—she whose life had been one proud success—she did not wish to hear any whispering voice that spoke of it as failure.

But as the evening drew nearer and the twilight closed in, there approached more and more distinctly a chill dread of the moment when she should meet the cold eyes and mocking smile of Virginia Shore.

She stood still at the thought, her arms falling to her sides, her swift pacing to and fro stilled, whilst in fancy she saw the chilly smile fade slowly, and in the eyes dawn gradually a tender warm light which mellowed their hardness, and gave the fulness of beauty to a lovely woman; and all the while was conscious that this tender miracle was the reflex of a warmer stronger passion that she had seen glow, and whose swift warmth she had seen die away. Now it might burn on—nay, it would, she knew it, her woman's instinct did not fail her here; perhaps on some far-past day she had seen and noted enough to foreshadow the future, should the chance arise.

And now it would arise; had she not done all she could to facilitate the possibility? And why not? What was there against it? In every way a most suitable marriage. Yes, the very words she had heard about her own. She wrung her hands with sudden passion, a cry escaped her, a low despairing cry. It startled her back into nervous consciousness of where she was, what she was doing—thinking. For the twentieth time that day she feverishly

struggled to command her thoughts, and set them to work in the chosen direction.

"Send for Prince Oscar," she said to a servant. In her little son's smiles and talk it was easier to read what she had gained, all she had to lose, than when left to follow her own maddening thoughts.

This was the reality, this little handsome blond-haired child, who was the link that bound her to the present life, casting over her that shadowy royalty which was his, giving her not only the sunshine of his smiles and the love of his warm tender heart, but standing to her as the symbol of that greatness to which she had attained. It was all a shadow, or little more than one; but in the world's eyes, her own little world in which she lived, it was a reality. Small wonder that she measured with the same measure, and all that lay beyond, love and life and fulness of loving, beloved womanhood, was but an unreal weak foolish dream.

Down-stairs, in the large well-lit drawing-room, everything went on as usual. Everything was just as it had always been since these weekly reunions had been established.

Virginia Shore, in her dress of shimmering green, moving about, a slender, attractive picture of graceful womanhood, or standing, the centre of a group, whose smiles responded to her light words and clever answers.

His Excellency quiet and watchful, M. Desprez with his delightful self-satisfaction and ready smiles, and the usual crowd of well-known faces and uniforms; amongst them here and there some passing stranger, noting it all with amused interest, or some silent watcher, whose name was better known than his appearance.

But two well-known faces were absent, and it was not long before low questions, nervous asides, or suggestive looks and smiles, noted the absence.

But they were uttered in asides: there was a general instinct that Prince Lesceynski's name it was as well not to mention. As to Captain Shore, he was his friend; it was safe to assume that where was the one, there was the other.

Whatever might be the story, Virginia Shore would know it. Of course she was the one to get it from, and yet if any one drew near her with any such intention, it did not come to much. She was a woman to whom it was difficult to address a point-blank question. There was something in the mocking smile which seemed always lying in wait, something in the cold eyes which made people nervous about offending her.

It was almost as if the Princess avoided her as well, though she had no indiscreet questions to ask; but at last, as Virginia passed by, she addressed her by name, and then was silent, as if she had nothing further to say.

"You have been suffering, I hear," Virginia said

in the pause, in her clear voice ; “ you are better, I hope ? ”

“ Yes, I am better,” the Princess replied, lifting her eyes steadily to the other woman, and then quickly dropping them. “ I was tired last night.”

“ Yes,” said Virginia, gravely, “ so I saw. And feverish I fear,—perhaps it would have been wiser not to have come down to-night.”

“ On the contrary, I am hoping the change will do me good. It is not often I spend a day indoors.”

“ And you found it wearisome ? Perhaps that was only the reaction from the previous fever.”

Again the Princess lifted her eyes swiftly, with a nervous glance which almost denoted fear, but they shifted directly under Virginia’s.

“ You should be careful, Princess,” she added, warningly ; “ the next thing to be feared is — a chill.”

Virginia’s eyes did not falter or change, there was no variation in her colour, but the delicate flame came and went under the blue eyes of the woman by whose side she stood. She noted the sudden clasp of the hands, and was about to speak again, when she was forestalled by another voice. It was his Excellency who spoke—unnoted he had drawn near.

“ Miss Shore adopting a new profession ? ” he queried. “ It sounds like a paragraph out of a *rade-mecum*. What are you prescribing for ? ”

“ I am not prescribing,” she answered, directly.

"I was giving a warning. That chills follow fever, and therefore the Princess should be careful."

"In my *vade-mecum*," he commented, "the chills come first; but I daresay in the matter of the cure, that is a minor point."

"You are sure to be right," she retorted, her eyes met his straight, "so I resign the case. Perhaps," with a slight smile, "I am interfering with one which you have already undertaken?"

"But, seriously," turning back to the Princess, "you do not look well."

"I am not," she said, suddenly sitting upright. "No," as his Excellency made some suggestion as to the advisability of her leaving—"no, thanks."

She leant forwards towards her fan, which lay on a small table by her side, and noting the movement, Virginia took it up, and, opening it, offered it to her.

"The fan," she observed, "with the mysterious means of escape," touching the little jewelled pendant; "the same fan," smiling towards his Excellency, "that you would keep out of the way of unhappy women, and which is therefore, as Prince Lescynski observed, so safe with her Highness."

The name that was being whispered behind every fan, the name no one dared to utter aloud, she spoke it as calmly and distinctly as if there were no silencing curtain dropped between it and the world. Even his Excellency looked at her with a little glance of admiring surprise, but was aware at the same time of the colour flushing into the other woman's face,

of the tell-tale droop of her eyes and quiver of her lips, and would have introduced some less agitating topic, had the chance been granted, but there was no consequent pause in the clear cold voice of Virginia Shore.

"He is not here to-night," with a momentary comprehensive glance round the room, opening and closing the jewelled fan as slowly as she spoke. "Well, he is rarely an absentee. I will tell you something, Princess," with a slight change of tone, and leaning a little nearer, but yet losing nothing of the idle languid grace of movement, which betrayed nothing but the careless talk of a woman striving to amuse or interest. "I have thought of what is the matter with you, and of what you want. Change," with slow impressiveness. "Something new—new toys. This," with a slight, almost imperceptible flirt of her fan towards the lights and the crowd, "grows monotonous, and though you do not know it, it is change you need."

"Perhaps so," the Princess replied, uneasily, and, stretching out her hand, she took the fan, opening and shutting it nervously.

"I am sure his Excellency will support my views?" Virginia looked up to where he still stood close by. "Don't you think change is good for women?"

"Good, did you say, or necessary?" he retorted.

"What is necessary must be good surely, or Nature is a very indifferent parent."

"I think we may concede that point. Nature is

in most cases a very indifferent parent. To the individual of course, not to the race."

"You may take him of whom we were just now speaking as the text to that sermon, Excellency. Prince Lescynski has certainly been a little unwisely treated by Nature, considering where his lot was to be cast. He is always in earnest, and this is an age in which to be in earnest is terribly out of date."

There was a slight questioning note in her voice, and she glanced idly from the one listener to the other, as if expecting a comment; but none coming, she finished her sentence after that pause.

"He should go and settle in England amongst Englishmen; I am sure he would feel much more at home there. Yes, that is the advice I shall offer him, if he ever deigns to ask my advice. He would be quite at his ease among a race of beings where he could follow his own habit of never pretending the most fragmentary interest in what does not interest him."

"You have known him well, Miss Shore, and have evidently studied him carefully, your epitome of his character is therefore valuable. A selfish man of the world might, I suppose, be considered a fair summing-up."

"From which I suppose that his Excellency has also summed up," she swiftly replied, but his words had brought a momentary shadow across the serenity of her eyes.

"Well, say on; for antagonistic ideas as well as

kindred ones are often of interest—if well expressed.

“You make me nervous, but in friendship—love—any of the many connecting-links between ourselves and those about us, there must be, between us and them, if not a similarity of aim, at the least a comprehension of each other’s aim.”

“You are now adopting a monastic habit of speech, Excellency, which is always a convenient garment; but translated, I suppose it means, that I have not in your opinion realised Prince Lescynski’s aim, or aims, and am therefore incapable of judging him.”

“Autre pays autre mœurs.”

He was silent when he had so spoken, and she went on—

“Thank you, Excellency. I was dull early in the evening, but that is a past dream. You have amused me, as always. I love enigmas, and now I can take all those you have given me away, and guess them at my leisure. But the Princess does not at all appreciate such talk, and, besides, she is ill, so she shall be spared it. Are you never superficial either?” she added.

“Either,” he repeated, as the Princess took no note of their talk or their silence, but sat on in unaccustomed quiet. She lifted her eyes, though, now at Virginia’s answer.

“It was my advice to Prince Dorislaus, almost the last time I saw him, to cultivate superficiality, and now I see another who needs the same advice. It

is the royal road," with a little semi-curtsey towards the Princess, "to ease and happiness. Adopt it therefore also."

"I am tired," the Princess said, "and am going to retire. Give me your arm, Excellency." It was a sudden determination, born of the feelings of these last two hours. She said "Good night," and bowing to those around her, took the old man's arm and crossed the room.

"Virginia Shore," she began immediately, "is in very high spirits. She says she is going by-and-by to England," she added, irrelevantly.

"Yes," his Excellency replied, "so she tells me. I often wonder she stays here so much."

"It is her home; she is better off here than elsewhere, she scarcely knows her father's people. Do you think——" she added, slowly—then, "Come in," as he opened the sitting-room door—"come in. Do you think her a beautiful woman?"

"Yes, I do," he replied.

"She is brilliant, clever, very clever," the woman enumerated, slowly, "and beautiful. I wonder she does not marry?"

"So do I—sometimes."

"And at other times?"

She did not sit down, she was wandering up and down the room, as she had done so much of the day.

"Oh, at other times," and his eyes smiled; "I think Miss Shore knows her own value so well that

she wisely waits until there is no doubt that she has chosen well—or at least prudently.”

The Princess took another turn, which brought her as far as the dark cool fernery with its starry lamps, and then swiftly retraced her steps.

“I have sometimes thought,” she began, her cheeks burning, her eyes shining, “that there was a likelihood of a marriage between her and Prince Lesceynski.”

Had she expected a swift indignant denial, a cold surprised refutation of her wild words? The colour faded again, her eyes drooped at the old man’s answer.

“So have I, Princess—it may come yet.”

Custom—habit does so much for us.

At the words, for a moment, it was as if there had needed but this one answer to make her fully aware of the unusual, violent emotions she had known all day, to give the stab to her heart which should explain where and how she was wounded; but she did not cry aloud, or utter another word on the subject: even her passionate, ill-regulated nature bowed to the training which prompted her to hide the wound as soon as it was discovered, and the next moment she was seated by the fire talking over the topics of the hour.

But when a little later her companion left her, and she was alone, to suffer unseen, and recognise what this day had been, and what the future days had yet to bring, then the waters which had been slowly

rising all the previous day and night seemed to gather till they had covered her very soul. She had turned a deaf ear, she had refused to acknowledge what it all meant—how much she had had offered her, how much she had given up, thrown away—and for what?

“I cannot live without him!” she cried. She was standing now by the window, the curtain pushed aside, her unseeing eyes fixed on the far-off beauties of the moon-silvered lake. “This past day has taught me that. Other days, evenings like this one! No, no! it is impossible. I will give up everything else, but not that.”

With feverish energy she drew paper and ink towards her to write. To whom? what? Her tired brain, unaccustomed to the excitement she had gone through, to the sleeplessness of the previous night, refused to guide her.

A note, a few words would bring him back—perhaps. Her cheeks flushed, what had his Excellency but now said? Did she not know it herself? Left to himself, maddened by her words and her silence alike, he would go—driven away by her own acts and words—and in the not very distant future he would marry Virginia Shore. She could see it as clearly here in the light as previously in the semi-darkness. The passionate love he had offered—refused. Turned to indignant anger by her words of doubt and cruelty, his love would then be offered to another, who would accept it, and

teach him how little he had given up to gain so much. "Beautiful, graceful, clever——"

Yes, she knew every line of the fair face, little cause to doubt its power if she chose to exert it.

The pen was in her hand now, what should she write? a cloud was between her eyes and the paper, a beating in her ears, or was it the violence of her own heart-beats which seemed to threaten suffocation?

"No," she pushed the paper away—"no; she could not write to him—she could not ask him to return, and what else was there for her to say?

"There was his Excellency,—a word, a line to him, and he would understand. That would be better; he had spoken, looked kindly, he was old, he would understand and help her."

Once more she took up the pen, and barely seeing, with trembling fingers framed the first words, then lifted her eyes, and met, how or why she knew not, the cold mocking gaze of Virginia Shore.

It was not the slight graceful figure and delicate features she had parted from so lately, but just the malicious curl of the lips, the cold disdainful mockery of the eyes, that she knew so well, dreaded so much.

They did not fade: other figures, more or less real, came and went, stood by her with a momentary expression of pity, surprise, wonder, as the tale of what she had done reached the ears of her little world; but these came and went, only Virginia

Shore remained on, mocking at the play which had been played before her, smiling in disdainful amusement at the little comedy. Comedy! into the woman's blue eyes swept a darting wave of passion. Comedy! To her who had seen the tragedy in the man's soul, was feeling the tragedy in her own!

But at the vision of Virginia she pushed away the pen and rose from her seat. Her taunting eyes followed her as she paced the room; her low mocking laughter pursued her, echoing in her ears when she stood at length, as if flying from it, in the darkened conservatory. Here, where she had stood that other night, she stood now; all the demons of love and passion, pride and vanity, fighting for the mastery. A battle of which it would be doubtful to foretell the issue.

Now, as she stood with clasped hands above her beating heart, only the consciousness of his loss to madden, and then, clear and distinct, that fatal laugh, which even here, in the scented darkness, brought the colour to her cheeks with the swiftness of a blow.

The chilliness of early dawn was in the air when she found herself standing by the burnt-out embers of the fire, the candles low in their sockets, whilst she regarded with tired aching eyes the tiny jewelled pendant, whose diamonds sparkled in the waning light.

She was mad, so she said, and she started as the words brought back those to which she had listened

here so short a time before ; and catching a glimpse of herself in a glass, she shuddered at the white face, the passionate eyes, the roughened hair, and wild expression. But she did not hesitate ; unsealing the little toy, she lifted it to where the light reflected its crystal clearness, then raised and drank it.

“ So safe in your hands.”

She thought of those words spoken by Prince Lescynski and smiled, and then wished she had written to him, and then was glad she had not.

“ It would make no difference, he would never know she had agonised and died rather than live without him, though she had not had the courage to face the world’s sneers for his sake.

“ Died.” Yes, after all, her life, of which she had thought so much, and which had been such a success, had very little to offer, now that this strain was put upon it—now that the gates were ajar, and showed her whereunto she might have attained.

The beats of her heart were calmer now, her eyes were growing heavy ; the long storm, the day’s unusual emotion, was at an end ; she rested her head more easily against the cushions of the sofa ; the yellow light from the lamps casting an aureole of brightness on to the golden head, showing the lines of pain about the mouth, the blue veins on the full white lids.

Seeing her thus, there was something childish in the curve of the rounded chin, which was at variance

with the upper part of the face—the shadows under the eyes.

Slowly the eyes closed; a little fluttering sigh, then the quick breathing gradually grew calmer, calmer; the lights faded, flickered, went out; the fire gave a little tremulous sound now and again as the ashes fell, and all was dark and quiet.

Dawn grew apace, the sun rose in a cloudless sky, glistening dew-drops shone on every spider's web across the untrodden grass, it shone across the placid waters of the lake, touching with autumnal glory the reddening leaves, the brooding swans and their white shadows, and finally stole into the little boudoir, and touched with rosy light the grey-beard's picture, the little child's, and finally the golden curls and soft curved outlines of the woman's face.

For a minute or two the early sunbeams stole in and out of the disordered masses of her hair, glorifying it with rays of golden light, and as they thus wandered, she moved a little, then opened wide anxious eyes on to her unaccustomed surroundings.

For a second or two the past was a blank, and then a gleam of honest sunlight caught and flashed back from the jewelled fan which lay at her feet, where she had dropped it when she had detached the trifling toy which lay by it unsealed and empty. Then she remembered; lifting it with strange silent wonder, as back to her memory stole the wild storm

of passion with which she had demanded from it an end of the ills of life.

Her hands were trembling as she lifted and looked at it. Of course in all these years it had either lost its power, or, perhaps, she who had acquired it had been deceived, and the crystal liquid she had obtained was but a harmless drop of water.

Anyway, this was the end.

She laughed aloud, an unmirthful laugh; this was what her life demanded—a toying with tragedy, and then this finale.

Who was she, to hope to bring pureness of love, or life, or even death into a life which required of her nothing but a simulation of all the passions? That was all that was possible; her life was made, and the great thing was, to live it so that no shadow of a smile or a taunt could follow and hurt her. She shivered; it was cold, and she opened the dividing-doors and passed into her room, where a sleepy maid sat dozing over the fire.

When she had dismissed her and was alone, she laughed again, a nervous, mirthless laugh. This was life—her life at least; if she should ever strive to escape the comedy which she had chosen, and walk on the grander lines of tragedy, it was impossible. Her training was against it, the end would surely be bathos such as this.

CHAPTER IX.

“ ‘What new do you find in my face?’

“ ‘Much. And you too have stepped into the Valley of the Shadow of Death. Well, a friend can only say, God help you!’ ”

NEUHEIM was a dreary little village containing one straggling main street, and an old-fashioned inn with a beer-garden, where the neighbours sat and talked and drank on long summer evenings.

Now the leaves were falling, and as the autumn evening was already closing in, it was in a stuffy rarely used guest-chamber that the two friends met to say good-bye.

Dorislaus Lesceynski had spent many hours of the day alone; he had walked about the village, wandered into the surrounding country, striving to pass the hours until the night express to Berlin, which stopped here, should arrive and take him away.

Under the circumstances, alone, with nothing to think of but the mad act that had brought him to this abrupt pause in his life, by the time it was afternoon, and, dispirited, weary in mind and body, he found his way back to the inn, the overwhelming

passion and despair had worn themselves out, and he merely knew himself to be physically tired. The day, too, had something to do with it; dull and grey, with a tinge of melancholy over all things, which was as a reflection of his own feelings.

"Only five." He took out his watch. How was he to get through the hours till the train left. With a shudder he thought of the close small room, with its white stove, the two or three common coloured lithographs on the walls, yesterday's paper on the table.

"There is a gentleman here asking for you."

Who could it be! Any one for the moment would be welcome.

He hurried up the stairs and opened the door. For the moment the sight of Jerome Shore's familiar face was so welcome that the revulsion of feeling from his previous desolation to this consciousness of abiding friendliness gave a huskiness to his voice as he clasped his hand in welcome.

Perhaps one of the great charms of Jerome Shore, one of the many which endeared him so much to those for whom he cared, was the promptness with which he performed little acts of service. There was almost a shade of womanliness in the intuitive perception he had as to what would please. It was scarcely unselfishness, though it was an immediate recognition of how best to serve his friends, born of real heart-kindliness. Other men might sacrifice themselves for those dear to them, either in love

or friendship. There are many who, if the trial came, would do some great thing, but there are very few who would have thought of the thousand little daily acts of kindness which endeared this man to those about him.

There was also, perhaps, something womanly in the facility of his speech, the readiness with which he could sympathise in words, as well as in thought and act. There was no doubt of the heartfelt relief with which Dorislaus recognised his visitor.

“Shore, how good of you to come!” His strong nervous clasp conveyed something of the feelings which animated him.

“What an abominable place you have taken refuge in!”

There was a touch of nervousness in Captain Shore’s voice as he spoke. “Well, as we are here,” he added directly, “let us make the best of it. You have ordered dinner? No,” as the other shook his head, “so best leave it to me. It is one of my strong points, you know, getting the best there is out of a place, or at least one about which I flatter myself.”

Yes, perhaps that was partly his secret, that he had the happy knack of bringing forth the best there was in people as well as in places—a certain quality in himself which called forth responsiveness in those about him. His voice was not clear and distinct like that of his sister, but soft and melodious, with some slight lingering on the last syllables that was pleasing to the ear, the voice of the German mother.

The dinner was not as dismal as it had threatened to be, and conversation, which had seemed at first difficult, became easier as time went on, and the host's good wine and well-cooked dinner began to have their effect. Prince Lescynski had scarcely been aware how cold and wretched, how hungry and tired he had been, until they sat over their cigars afterwards, whilst the landlord's daughter came and went; a pretty, fair-haired, blue-eyed girl, who looked at them with unconcealed interest, and was in herself, as Captain Shore averred, well worth the journey.

At any rate, her comings and goings had prevented embarrassing silences or difficult talk, and for the moment, after being left alone, it was difficult to introduce the subject that was uppermost in the thoughts of both.

"Well, this is a change, at any rate, from the Thursday evenings at the Palace," so said Jerome.

"How are you going back?" Dorislaus did not look up as he put his question.

"Your train leaves about twelve, does it not? Well, I don't expect to be up to catch the six o'clock express to-morrow morning, so I shall probably dawdle in by the slow train: it arrives about two or three."

"It was very good of you to come, Jerome," he leant forward and looked at him, "you don't know how good. I was feeling pretty desperate, I can tell you, and this place all to one's self till twelve o'clock

to-night was not a cheerful one to wait in, with nothing to do but think."

The expansiveness of the speech unloosed Jerome's tongue.

"What are you going to do?"

"Do! What can I do?" the other retorted. "A man of my education and life is fit for nothing apart from his profession. I can go to Poland and stir up an insurrection," he added, "I don't see the possibility of any other future."

"Siberia is a chilly place in winter—so they say," Jerome answered, with his slight drawl.

There was a half-smile from his companion.

"Yes," he said, "it behoves one to remember that."

"Where will you go first?" Captain Shore added, after a moment's silence.

"I shall not stay in Berlin, I shall go on to Paris. Will you write?"

He got up when he had spoken, laying down his cigar, and walked over to the small window, pushing aside the curtains.

"Jerome," he began, without turning his head, "I can't say anything to you—and besides, we think differently; but I shall never forget your friendship. *You* think," he went on, more excitedly, "that she has trifled—misled,—God knows what, and I—well, I think quite differently. I think she has had no choice." His eyes were lifted to the skies above, he did not look round.

Overhead the grey dull day had given place to a dark night, into which the stars were stealing one by one.

There is nothing colder and purer than starlight—moonlight is different, it is magic, it makes familiar things unreal, starlight merely purifies them.

In a great susceptibility to external influences there is always a source of danger. For a man of Dorislaus Lesceynski's emotional temperament there was always an unconscious reflection of the passing moods of others, even of those of nature. The sight of the calm sky overhead, with the puffs of cloud wafted lightly across it, chilled him, disturbing his lately acquired calm.

"Starlight is a wretchedly cold thing," he said, as if to himself.

"Calm though, and lovely," interposed Jerome, looking across to where his friend had flung up the window, and was leaning out into the chilly night.

"Perhaps. But it is a hateful thought," Dorislaus added, a moment later, "if you think how far off the stars are from us—that their light was kindled eons before we came into existence."

"It does not do to think of such hows and whens," Jerome answered—he also had laid aside his cigar; "we can only accept what is."

"Even," questioned Dorislaus, with a bitter laugh, "when we know it is nothing—merely the reflection of a dead fire!

"That's all rubbish," he went on, looking back into the room from where he stood now with his back to the window; "we must, as you say, make the best of what is, and not waste time regretting that the past is past. Notwithstanding your warning, I am in the mood now in which I should make a first-rate conspirator."

He began pacing then up and down the room with swift nervous steps, sometimes talking, sometimes in a despairing silence, and Jerome recognising that, thought it was as well he was there, yet after all they were on that debatable land where friendship is powerless to do more than sustain with the knowledge of its presence.

In one of Bourget's novels he reminds us that it does not do to judge of a man's character by one individual action. Just the judgment we are the most likely to pass, whereas an individual action is not even significative of the man, but merely the result of a momentary combination of circumstances, lifting him above, or pushing him below, his natural self. It is always possible, and the steady habits of years are at once forgotten in the wild momentary outburst which may never be repeated.

Thus involuntarily Jerome Shore, with the facility with which we all accustom ourselves to new circumstances, had ceased to think of Dorislaus as the man with whom he had been intimate for so many years, and had in a moment come to view him entirely in the light of one from whom mad eccentric-

ities might at any moment be expected. The madness was significative, perhaps, of the forces that had lain dormant for long. After all, there may have been instinctive reasoning in his mental attitude. Even an apparently extinct volcano is not always to be trusted, how much less when we ourselves have seen it in course of eruption!

"I am still rather mad," he said, presently; "at least I have not reached that point of sanity where we regret we have betrayed our mental weaknesses to others."

He spoke defiantly, yet with a half-questioning note in his voice, to which Jerome replied—

"Dorislaus, I cannot help you; I wish to goodness I could! It seems black enough, and blacker," after a slight hesitation, "because I don't believe she is worth it."

He rose as he spoke, as if he expected a violent answer, but none came. Dorislaus had turned back again to the starlit night—perhaps had not heard. Jerome hoped he had not. But it was not so. Though he was looking now at the chill light above, now to the dark world below, still, whichever way he looked, it was to see the red gold of her hair, the angry light in her eyes, the passionate words that had wounded, the cold silence that had followed.

And other times, other happier moments, came back, when she had smiled at him, and called him to her side, making easily read excuses to keep him

near her, when her cheeks had reddened under his looks, and her eyes drooped under his.

Was that the meaning of it all? Just a coquette to whom this homage was flattering, but from whom no response was possible.

And yet, yet the very thought brought a swift refutation, as back to his memory came looks and tones he could not mistake. A quick painful sigh escaped him, he looked down to find Jerome standing by his side.

"Forgive me," he said, gently; "it is only because I am wretched at your going away that I am prompted to make such observations. That *you* believe in her," with a nervous falter in his voice, "is quite enough for me."

"You are a good fellow, Jerome," Dorislaus said, gratefully. "If I have had no luck in anything else, I have had it in friendship."

He smiled so saying, the rare smile which lightened his face, that was always a little sad, and gave added sweetness to the eyes and to the mouth, which was severe in repose, and the smile lifted something of the weight off Jerome's heart.

"I will walk with you to the station," he said, noting how late it had become, and Dorislaus gladly assented.

It was a relief, even though speech was difficult, not to be left sooner than need be to the dominion of his own thoughts,—the memory of the past, the gloomy prophecy for the future.

"If I think of anything to do, I will write and tell you, Jerome," he said, as they sauntered down the village street, "though I don't see much possibility of it; but I am not fit for idleness, and as you don't advise Poland," he added, "I do not see what chance I have."

"Oh, the world is all before you—except Poland, or the diplomatic service; I don't advise that."

"Another limitation. Why not?"

Dorislaus spoke absently, but he smiled again at Jerome's answer in his soft voice—

"I should be afraid you might not succeed. It is rather a gift to know how to deal with royalty."

"Sometimes," Dorislaus answered, "you are very like your sister—that is an observation she might have made. She is very clever," he finished, slowly.

"Thank you, Dorislaus, you are very flattering. I am glad I am *sometimes* like her."

Prince Lescynski did not laugh, or refute the words. "But even out of her sentiments," he said, "you take the sting."

"No, I am quite harmless." Jerome sighed. "I shall step through the world quite easily and safely."

Dorislaus looked at him, he was a little the taller of the two, Jerome's grey eyes were lifted to meet his own.

"There is no safeguard for the future," he cried, with a ring of passion in his voice, "unless——" he hesitated. "Get Miss Shore to teach you," he

added, "she is the only person I know who holds the secret."

"Yes," said Jerome, vaguely, "she is different from other women."

He was conscious of, and disturbed by, the other's passion.

"But, after all, I do not wish to avoid feeling. One pays for it," he began, with a dim idea of offering consolation, "of course, but——"

"Yes, it has its price," the other retorted bitterly. "Make sure when you pay you get your money's worth—that is what I mean by Miss Shore's secret, that you should get her to teach you."

"Yes, yes——" His words had again ruffled the surface, the outward calm had deceived him for the moment into believing the storm had subsided. "It is a mistake to give yourself away—that is an Americanism, but a good one," and he strove by the aid of German and French to render its meaning, with the kindly thought of reaching lighter topics before they parted, but his efforts were futile. It was almost in silence the quarter of an hour in the station was passed, pacing up and down the ill-lit platform; and when the train came in sight and a place had been found, even a parting word was difficult to think of.

"If," Jerome hazarded—"if you would like me to come to Berlin, or Paris even, you will let me know, won't you? If it is possible to get leave, I would go to you."

"Thank you." Dorislaus held out his slim brown hand and clasped the other's. "I can say nothing, my soul is black with despair," and he gave a nervous little laugh, "but I shall not forget all the same. Write."

That was his last word as the train moved slowly out of the station, and Jerome nodded, it seemed to him he could say nothing. Those other words were sounding in his ears, the reflection of them was in the face he watched till it passed from his sight.

It seemed like watching the darkness slowly draw out of his sight a young life full of promise; what would become of it in that loneliness and darkness into which he had seen it taken? to what would the despair in the brilliant eyes give place? Vaguely Jerome Shore realised that he had been present at a crisis in a life, and that afterwards—by-and-by—something would be the result. That after this anguish must ensue a new birth. At every crisis in life it is as if we were facing eternity. Eternity, of course, is always about us, but mists conceal it. Sometimes, however, a light thing pushes them aside, sometimes we ourselves ascend into the high places, and thus pierce the clouds.

Unwillingly or willingly, anything that lifts us up above ourselves takes us into a new life, and to a man, surely the better higher part of him is created by what he loves. By force of circumstances, or

through innate strength, or even through love of combat, the descent into the arena may be taken, but once there no retreat is possible. There are only two exits, as the Spartan mother said of old—
“With this or upon it.”

CHAPTER X.

“Un sourire n’est qu’une larme qui sèche ; la joie n’est qu’un chagrin qui se calme.”

THE mists assembled again towards morning, the stars vanished one by one, and when the dawn broke, a steady soaking rain was falling, so fine that it had almost the effect of a fog, as Captain Shore looked now and then towards the window, as he lingered over a late breakfast.

The loneliness and gloom were depressing, and it was with unfeigned relief that he at last recognised the hour had come when he was at liberty to walk to the station without the prospect of unlimited waiting there.

He had given himself as much time as possible in his anxiety to escape the gloom of the “Golden Lion,” but the rain was too persistent to make dawdling desirable ; almost unconsciously he hurried, splashing through the puddles, only to discover when within sight of the station that he had allowed a wider margin than he had intended. Well, it was a change, and had turned the current of his thoughts ;

besides, he had escaped the society of the commercial travellers, who were following in the omnibus, and, though damp and dreary, the station was under shelter: it was better to walk up and down there than to sit on in loneliness.

The station was as yet deserted; but under its roof, he was able to walk, pursuing his own thoughts, protected from the rain, and it was ten minutes before he made his way outside, to see if there were any signs of the omnibus and his luggage.

Passing a bench placed at the corner of a draughty narrow passage which led into the outer air, he noticed that it was occupied by a young girl, with whom the station-master was holding a long conversation, or rather monologue.

He was not near enough to hear the particulars; it sounded very uninteresting, all about trains and times, and expresses and "ordinarys"; but he was speaking so loud and emphatically, and the girl was listening with such an expression of strained attention, that he was unavoidably attracted.

The official turned away, interrupted apparently in the midst of his explanations by a voice from the office, and Jerome approaching, with the intention of passing through the dark entry, saw two tears slowly well out of the girl's eyes, and steal slowly, unheeded and unchecked, down her cheeks.

The unusualness of this display of trouble, for she seemed quite unconscious of his presence, never

lifting her eyes, touched him, and as he half paused, she looked up.

A slim figure, a young face, *very* young, with soft eyes, now dim with tears, set under straight black brows, and an expression so troubled that he did not again hesitate.

"You are in trouble," he questioned; "can I help you?"

A quick shadow of fear passed into her eyes, and then, her voice trembling with eagerness, "Do you speak English?" she asked, in very foreign German.

"Surely," he smiled. "I am English," he added, encouragingly; "what can I do for you?"

"Tell me," she was standing up now, her voice full of half-terrified eagerness—"tell me, *please*, how I can get back to Ingelheim?"

"The train leaves at two," he answered. "I am waiting for it also, so you need not worry any more about it. You have your ticket?" he questioned; "I am going to get mine."

"Yes, thank you," and she held out a return half.

"That is all right; I shall be back in a moment. Don't let us stay here," he went on, as he re-appeared; "it is the draughtiest and chilliest corner in the whole station. Did the station-master recommend it," he questioned; "I heard him giving you a great deal of advice."

"No, I have waited there all the time."

"All the time?" he repeated, wonderingly.

"Yes," she said, seating herself in the place he

indicated ; " I came to catch the early train, but I just missed it."

" And have you been here ever since ? "

" Yes," she sighed.

He noted now, looking at her more particularly, that she was white and wearied, and his heart was touched, amid his brain-wonderings, as to the cause.

" But you should not have waited here in this desolate cold place. There is an hotel close at hand. I wonder your friend the station-master did not advise it."

She coloured quickly, hotly, with a young girl's nervousness, and then, " I did not understand him," she replied. " I do not know much German," lifting her eyes, which were soft and gentle ; " I could not make out what he said."

" But you should not be travelling alone, under such circumstances. I beg your pardon," as she made no reply ; but in a moment she went on—

" I want to send a telegram. Could you ? " colouring again, and hesitating,—" I don't know how—— They will be so anxious."

" Yes, certainly, write the address," and he took the pencil off his chain and held it out with an old envelope ; " I will send it."

She scribbled a line in English, and gave it to him, with a look of evident relief.

" It is just to tell them," vaguely, " when to expect me."

He took the scrap of paper and glanced over it as he turned away, and then looked swiftly back, with a little start of surprise.

"Of course," he began, "you are M. Desprez's English pupil. It was stupid of me not to guess it. Well, you will not know me; but to-morrow, anyhow, we were to have become acquainted; I am Captain Shore, Miss Shore's brother."

A look of pleased recognition chased the shadows from her face.

"Yes, I know. Miss Shore is very kind, I am to go to tea with her to-morrow."

When he came back, after a few minutes' absence, she was still sitting just where he had left her, her eyes fixed on the dark passage, down which he had disappeared. There was no doubt about the glad relief as he approached.

"Only a sandwich," holding out a little parcel; "it was all I could find, but it is better than starving to death. Fortunately there is a restaurant close at hand," he said, sitting down beside her; following him was a buff-headed, stupid-looking waiter, with a bottle of wine and two glasses. "It is lucky, isn't it," he went on, cheerfully, "that I decided to come and wait here, instead of stopping till the last moment at the 'Golden Lion'? Now we can refresh ourselves before we get into the slowest train in Germany."

She shook her head at first, but he would not take a refusal, and when she had tasted the wine, he noted

that the colour stole back into her cheeks and lips, and that she ate the food with appetite.

"It will be late also," he went on, "slow trains always are; so you must tell me how all these misfortunes came about."

There was something so kindly and encouraging in his manner and voice, that in a few moments all her slight story was told.

She had been spending a couple of days with an old lady, a friend of M. Desprez, and it had been arranged she was to return this morning by the nine express; that she had been driven to the station in a little basket-carriage by the old lady's gardener, and that when she arrived on the platform it was to find the train had gone.

She had not understood very well at first what the station-master had said, and when she had grasped his meaning, that she had missed her train, and had to wait until the afternoon, she had run out into the road, to find the carriage and the fat pony, and the gardener, who had said he wanted to get back, had disappeared, and that she was alone in this strange place, unable to make herself understood, and understanding little, except that there were hours to wait.

"It was a very long time, and I was very unhappy," she ended. "When you came, he" (looking towards the station-master) "told me something which I could not understand, and it seemed hopeless." The memory of the past misery came across her, and chased away the smiles that had been lightening her

eyes. For a moment there was the reflection of the tears he had seen ; but they vanished immediately when she looked up at him, and an expression of confidence and reliance took their place.

“ But it is all right now,” she said ; “ it was stupid to be frightened and nervous, but I am not used to being alone.”

“ I think you were only hungry,” he answered pleasantly, “ not frightened. And now we need not have another anxious moment ; we have telegraphed to Miss Desprez, so we can hope that her mind is at rest ; we are warmed and comforted, so far, at least, as the day admits of it—and here is the train ! ”

The train was not crowded, at least it was easy to find an empty first, into which he took her, and then seated himself opposite her. Now that she was at ease, and the expression of patient weariness which had first attracted his attention had disappeared, he saw that there was something very pleasing about the outlines of her face, which was a delicate oval ; the smooth dark hair, which waved lightly over the pretty forehead ; the soft tenderness of the eyes, with their straight black lashes and clearly defined brows.

If not beautiful, or even pretty, there was a great deal to interest. The figure, though immature and unformed, was slight and graceful ; the ungloved hands, clasped in her lap, were well shaped, the small head was carried proudly.

She did not talk much spontaneously, but it took

but a few words from him to elicit from her the history of her short uneventful life.

Uneventful, at least, until these last months, into which it seemed all there was to tell had been crowded.

There was unconscious relief for him in turning his attention to something so very different from the sea of trouble with which he had come in contact the previous night. He was in a measure so reflective of the moods of others, that a part of the black shadow in which Dorislaus Lesceynski had walked had enveloped him also, and he experienced something of the escape from actual sorrow in this young, fresh, untried nature, which had about it the calm and promise of dawn.

He drew her on to talk ; so much older, so much interested, it was small wonder he succeeded.

Looking back afterwards, it surprised her to remember how much she had told him, how many of her hitherto unspoken hopes and fears she had laid bare to this stranger.

But he was so kind, she thought, and she smiled to herself at the recollection of the blond head, the eager grey eyes that had looked at her with such interest, the voice that had questioned her.

It was a long journey : three hours in a slow train, with a stop every quarter of an hour, admits of much conversation, and intimacy is accepted under such conditions. When they were approaching Ingelheim, the dull rainy afternoon was closing in.

"I will get you a cab," he said, "if Miss Desprez is not here. Of course," as she faltered some hesitating words, "it is too wet to walk. I would take you myself," he added, "only that I must go straight to the barracks. I am late also," he smiled.

She smiled also, but her eyes were serious. They were stopping now; she leaned forward to speak, evidently words were not easy to find.

"Captain Shore, you have been so good," she began, nervously.

He was standing up; looking down, it was only her eyes that he saw. Notwithstanding their prettiness, it was not of that he was thinking, but of some unusual tender pathos, scarcely the expression of a child; they seemed to hold either an inheritance of pain, or the prophecy of sorrow yet to come. Anyhow, it touched him in a way for which he was unprepared. As if one should smile at a child, and, instead of a laugh, be answered by the look of one who had done battle with the world.

He did not make a light rejoinder, such as had at first risen to his lips; he answered, seriously, that he was glad he had been there, and then they were in Ingelheim, and Emilie Desprez was on the platform, full of tender affectionate words to Dolores, and of thanks to him.

"Your message was such a relief," she was walking by his side as they left the station; "I have been most terribly anxious. Yes, we ought not to have sent her alone, but I could not go, and father

was away, and had wished it. But they should have been more thoughtful. Poor little Dolores," she took the girl's hand in hers, "it was most careless !

"But now it is over, and safely over," with a grateful glance at Captain Shore ; "we will forget all the troubles, will we not, Dolores ? and remember only the pleasant part. That is, you."

Dolores did not answer, but she lifted her head and looked at him in the sudden glare of a flaring gas-jet, and there was little difficulty in reading her assent.

CHAPTER XI.

“Le souvenir du Plaisir est un Bonheur, le souvenir du Bonheur est un Regret.”

NOTWITHSTANDING the fatigue and anxiety of the day, the mental and physical weariness which made Emilie send her to bed early, Dolores was far too excited to sleep. The narrow routine of her life at Beverley, which had been exchanged for the wider horizon and larger interests of the last few months, both had now given place to a purely personal sensation of the possibilities of life such as she had never hitherto imagined.

She had been a child so long, that perhaps it was natural there should be no intervening space, but that she should suddenly become a woman. The very necessities of her life so ordained it.

She tossed restlessly about for many hours before she could sleep, whilst over and over in her fevered, over-tired brain, was re-enacted the little drama of the morning.

The tears, of which she had been almost unconscious at the time, recurred to her memory, and

made her flush in the darkness; the kind tones of his voice rang in her ears, each little sentence returning, and making itself heard in the stillness.

At last she fell asleep, an uneasy, troubled sleep, with disturbing dreams, that faintly reflected the occurrences of the day, but brought into the new scenes far-off, half-forgotten forms, as is the perplexing habit of dreams, and when she awoke it was of James Traherne she was thinking, his indistinct presence that was her last dreamful consciousness.

She lifted herself on her elbow and looked towards the shelf where the photographs of those who had constituted home looked down upon her. A homely uninteresting little group. Mrs Traherne in a wide-spreading crinoline, one hand stiffly holding a basket of flowers, the other resting on a small table. Mr Traherne, a more modern attempt—a head only; his small unimportant features magnified into portentous size, coarseness vulgarising what was merely uninteresting. The two girls standing side by side, their neat plaits betokening extra care for such an occasion, and their stolid expressions indicating a shadowy nervousness that had seized them at the fatal moment; and over and above these, in a plain leathern frame, just as he had given it to her before leaving, the well-known form of broad-shouldered Jem Traherne. One of those pictures which we now and then come across, and which make us realise the value of photography.

It was he himself, as she had seen him hundreds

of times, standing very straight, with his arms folded, his head lifted in the way she knew, his clear grey eyes looking straight before him, the hair pushed back from his low broad forehead; even the shabby old shooting-suit, the familiar garb which he had worn on so many rambles, in which she had borne him company.

She had not forgotten him, nor indeed any of those towards whom she still looked as home; but of late they had ceased to occupy the chief thoughts in her life, natural but painful fact, that it is the everyday and familiar things which constitute the chief part of our lives and thoughts; but this morning she was aware of a pang of regret as she realised how much they had become the past. It is leaving hold of a rope that secures us to the shore, to forsake the past. Oftenest we do it unconsciously, without realising it until another life has taken the place of the old one, but should we realise what is happening, there is always an instinctive effort to prevent it.

"I will write to him to-day," was Dolores's thought as she dressed. "My last letter was very short, there is really so little to say. But I know he likes to hear from me."

She looked again, as she so decided, at the strong self-reliant figure, and sighed. Sometimes, when the woman's soul is born, it can read the secret that the child's careless eyes had not discovered; perhaps such presentiment of discovery was at hand.

M. Desprez was away—to both girls this fact was a relief. Emilie talked much more than usual, both at breakfast and afterwards, as she came and went amid her household tasks, whilst Dolores sat in the sitting-room busy over her letter.

She was excited still, and she found the letter difficult of composition; but this excitement was different from that of the preceding night. It was not retrospective but prophetic. Every time the little clock struck she was aware of the fact that another hour had passed that separated her from this coming afternoon. She did not hide her happiness, would not, if she could. Emilie was well aware of it, and interpreted it as the natural delight of a young girl, who was kept very hard at work, at the prospect of a party of any kind; and this one held all sorts of possibilities, for Miss Shore's name was well known, and much commented on by the good people of Ingelheim.

She only wished, and she sighed as she noted the girl's excited eyes turned to the dull rainy day, that it was with such feelings she herself were looking forward to it.

The weight on her heart was so heavy that now and then she suddenly paused, aware of it, to ask what it was that hung over her, casting such a shadow before. Then started to find that it was the prospect of meeting Antoine. He who alone held for her any personal happiness—he, with whom an occasional word or passing glimpse these past

months had been sufficient to fill her life with sunshine for days. And now she knew that in all human probability she would be with him for a couple of hours, able to look at him, speak to him, listen to the enchanting music of which he held the key, and with all this in prospect, nothing but a heart-ache.

"It must be conscience," she said, wearily, "and yet——" And in answer to her doubting words up came the special pleader that we all retain, and sought to establish a case for her.

"You are only doing what your father himself wished. Miss Shore's guests are a matter for her to decide. Your father has not even forbidden your speaking to him. To forbid him coming to his house is a very different thing. Besides, you owe a duty to the man who loves you, and whom you love, as well as to your father. Even Dolores, child as she is, recognised that." Thus in inward argument and outward calm the day wore itself away. Dolores's letter was written, Emilie's household duties accomplished, it was time to think of preparing for the afternoon.

"We will drive," Emilie decided, though Dolores, eager for a walk, and the necessity for an earlier start, combated the idea.

But the longest hours slip past somehow; the moment of departure came at length. M. Desprez's smart little brougham appeared, and Emilie, unsmiling and wearied, conscious of swerving from the

right, with a weak inability to foresee the end, stepped in, to continue the battle which had torn her soul all day, and seated herself by the girl, whose glad young eyes reflected the expected happiness which youth foresees, and recognises as its own especial lot.

Miss Shore was awaiting her guests. She turned from the contemplation of the dull weather to welcome them.

"I don't believe it will ever be fine again," she said, in answer to Emilie's comment on the rain. "Not that that matters; I am one of the lucky beings whom weather does not influence. But you will sit down. Take off your cloak; you must find the room warm, and I will give you tea—real English tea," with a smile at Dolores.

It was so easy for Virginia Shore to make herself charming, and even if the charm was only to be exercised over a little stray schoolgirl, she could not resist it; there was an incentive in the easily recognised effect on the girl. Emilie Desprez had won her heart: her kindness and sweetness, the love with which she had welcomed her, had aroused gratitude and tenderness, but this was quite different. This was a scene out of fairy-land; she herself was under a spell. This quaint room with its strange ornaments, the flowers and ferns, the pictures and books, the weapons on the walls which caught and reflected the glow of firelight from the open hearth,

the tall graceful woman, with her bright hair and clear colourless complexion, in her clinging gown of dark bright red, which was just a shade brighter than the dull red of the walls. It was something unimagined, unpictured in thought or dream, and the only sensation she had was that this enchanted ground was worthy of the hero who had come to her help yesterday.

It was a world above and beyond her own, she thought, with girlish humility and enthusiasm mingled, but it was a world in which she liked to imagine him living; and her soft eyes followed Virginia's every movement, noted the slim ringless hands amongst the silver and delicate Sèvres, the sweep of the crimson gown. She did not wish to talk, she scarcely heard, and did not heed the conversation between the others; her attention was so absorbed that she coloured hotly when she recognised she was being addressed.

"Then I must not ask you to sing, but we shall have other music. Do you like my ornaments?" following the girl's curious glances round the room. "Afterwards, if you like, I will show them to you. My brother will be here presently," she added, "he will tell you all about them, he tells a story better than I do."

She turned back again to her talk with Emilie, who, she recognised, was not at her ease; perhaps she half guessed the reason, but she must find out, and before Antoine arrived. All her own interests

were pushed aside, as with clear eyes and thought she set her mind to fathom the state of affairs. For some reason there was a difference—then the affair must be in a different stage—and if so, it would be of interest to know in what. Emilie Desprez was no actress, beyond the intuitive skill each woman possesses, when it comes to hiding her heart's workings; there was little Virginia Shore did not know or guess, as the time passed.

It is a good plan to have read a play through before taking our place in a theatre. One can then appreciate the points better, although, perhaps, if we wish to judge of it as a whole, it is almost better to have come unprepared. To Virginia the small points were of greater interest than the plot; it made really but very little difference in the interest and excitement the play afforded, how it ended. It was the characters that were of interest, not the plot.

By-and-by Miss Shore suggested a duet, the ostensible cause of Emilie's visit.

"It is good practice," she said, "and I so rarely have the chance. And you," she went on, turning to the girl, "will you be happy, and amuse yourself as you like? there are plenty of books."

"I am quite happy," Dolores replied. "Thank you, no, I do not want a book; it is so lovely, I like looking about."

Virginia smiled, well pleased at the heartfelt flattery, and took her to her own especial seat in the

narrow space between the two rooms; the curtain was lifted that separated it from the sitting-room, and Dolores remained by the window, looking across to the distant waters of the lake, whilst the others began their duet. Her heart was beating in an unaccustomed way, it was a relief to be alone for a moment; the music fitted into her dreamlike feelings, she was scarcely aware of voices, whilst she watched the shadows of approaching night stealing across the distant park, and blurring the colours of the flowers in the gay parterres below.

Into the other room, meanwhile, had entered Captain Shore and Antoine Lütz. Virginia had played steadily on through their entrance, just turning her head with a nod and a word; but she was well aware that her companion faltered, glanced up with a nervous smile, and continued almost mechanically afterwards.

“Miss Traherne is not here?” Jerome questioned, leaning over his sister.

She did not look up—could not—in the midst of a particularly intricate passage, but she murmured, “Yes; in the window, behind the curtain,” to the time of the music. “Go and speak to her;” and as Jerome prepared to obey—“tell M. Lütz to help himself to tea if he likes it, which I doubt. I cannot leave off;” and Jerome gave his message, and then walked across the room. He was relieved, he had felt distinctly disappointed when he had come in and found no one there but Emilie Desprez. He

had a curiosity to see again his tearful friend of the Neuheim station, and also the girl whose eyes had met his by the light of the gas-jet. He half wondered what she would be like here, in these very different surroundings, which he had learnt to associate with such very different people—ladies of the Court, ladies whose laughter and smiles and interests he knew so well, to whose caprices he was so used; ladies with the same tastes as his sister, for instance—like her, perhaps, in that, though different in all else. There was only one Virginia Shore, he thought proudly.

Yes, this was a very different type from those of whom he had been thinking; the red walls and gleaming spears, the odd, incongruous weapons, had never formed a background for such a one as this.

From where he stood he could see the black-clad figure. A black cashmere, Mrs Traherne had decided, was the most useful dress for a best one. It was a very plain unremarkable dress, but Dolores was quite satisfied with it—it may be doubted if she had ever given it a passing thought. It was her best, that was all, and therefore of course to be worn on such an important occasion. Emilie's clever French fingers had manufactured a soft, black velvet, wide-brimmed hat, and from under its shadow her sweet eyes looked over the dreary winter landscape with a touch of that content, yet mingled with expectancy, that they had reflected all day.

At the slight sound he made she turned her head,

and there was little doubt as to her feelings now. The swift red coursed up into her cheeks, her lips parted with a smile of welcome, her eyes smiled too, as she made a step towards him holding out her hand.

"I was so disappointed," he said, "I was afraid you had not come. Why did they send you in here, or did you hide on purpose?"

"No; Miss Shore told me I might look at everything, and I stopped here to listen to the music and to look at the garden. Is it not all beautiful?" she went on, "I never imagined anything like it, and *she*," with a wave of enthusiasm, "is lovely! The loveliest woman I have ever seen in my life." She took a step nearer, and looked past him towards the piano, where was visible the sweep of a red gown across a fur rug, the outline of a small head.

Jerome was pleased; any praise of his sister, even from such an ignorant source, gratified him.

"Don't go," he said; "it is very nice in here, and we can talk. If we went in there, they would begin asking us to be quiet, and I have so many things to tell you. Sit down," he added, "and I will creep in and fetch you some tea at an especially noisy part. No?" as she shook her head—"oh, you have had it," with a little mock sigh of relief, "I thought you were going to pretend you were so Germanised that you had learnt to dislike it."

"I am not very Germanised yet," she said, gravely,

“when I cannot understand a station-master telling me about my train.”

“Well, we must be very glad of that,” he answered, “because if you had talked as brilliantly as I do, for instance, you would have travelled for two hours yesterday in a carriage with four mothers and eight children, and I should have had a smoking-carriage to myself.” And then they both laughed, and some one on the other side of the curtain said, “Hush,” and they laughed again, and it was to Dolores as if she had been stealing through a solitary, dark, uninteresting path, and all of a sudden she had found her way into another world, where the sun shone, and every one was gay and happy and young.

“I will speak in the lowest voice possible,” Captain Shore said, after the rebuking “Hush,” “and you need not speak at all, just nod to show you hear me; but M. Lütz notwithstanding, I must attempt to do as my sister told me, and amuse you. Now, how shall I begin?”

“With these,” Dolores answered, softly, “I have been wondering all this time about them.”

Over the tall narrow arch which led into the room, and across which, on the other side, a curtain was looped, here on this inner side were crossed above the doorway two drooping flags, their torn ragged folds where Virginia’s eyes could rest on them, when she looked up from her work, away from the garden. They harmonised with the rest of this strange room,

and held, like all else in it, an interest apart from a woman's life.

"They are French," he said, "my father captured them in '70;" and then, noting the interest in her eyes, "he was wounded in the war, and soon after it left him an invalid. He gave them to Virginia; she was only a child then, but she was like him, and grew up a brave, strong, self-reliant woman, and she was never tired of hearing about the war and what he had done and suffered. His picture is in the other room on an easel; you must look when you return, and you will see how much she resembles him. We can go now," he went on, as there was a cessation of music, followed by the sound of many voices. "Ah, his Excellency, that is his voice." He was standing by the opening, and without looking round, "Well, it's much nicer in here, I think; but of course it's more amusing in there, so," looking suddenly back, "perhaps you had better come. His Excellency will favour you," lowering his tones a little, "with some of his wisdom, I daresay: he is very kind to the young."

"No, please don't,"—she stretched out her hand almost involuntarily,—“don't go. I don't know any one else, and Emilie will be busy,”—in nervous short sentences. "I have never,"—flushing,—“been to a party before. I don't know what to do."

He almost felt inclined to laugh just for one moment, and then he recognised the deep earnestness in eyes and voice, and did not even smile.

"And I have been to so many," he said, "that it really does not seem fair. But it's useful, isn't it?"—he had reseated himself in the chair from which he had risen—"because I can tell you all that you don't know."

"Perhaps," she began, "you ought not to stay."

There was a wistful eagerness in her voice, and he combated the words at once.

"No, my duties are very clear," he smiled; "they were told me at once, and I am fulfilling them at present. Duty is not often so easy, is it?"

He had drawn a chair beside her, and had seated himself; it was so easy, as he had said, so delightful to find a listener to whom the smallest facts of everyday life were a revelation, and whose eyes so frankly expressed their owner's content—it was, in truth, hardly worth while to move.

In the other room the music had come to an end. Antoine and Emilie were talking by the piano, seizing these moments—in which Miss Shore was busy giving his Excellency a cup of tea—to speak, or attempt to speak of all that was in their hearts.

Something, however, was wanting. Emilie was aware that by-and-by she would recall much she had wished to say, and would recognise that this opportunity had been neglected; it was so seldom they met, and now her tongue was dumb, and nothing would come but the trifling small-talk which the piano and music conjured up. Antoine,

too, looked ill—worse than the last time—and coughed often, a weak wearing cough, which pained her to listen to, and she was aware, as her father had been, of the inefficiency of his greatcoat. All these things rose up when she would have spoken, and brought tears to her eyes; then, recognising the unsuitability of the moment for tears, she strove to avoid the words that might bring them—small wonder she was not at her ease.

When his Excellency had put in an unexpected appearance, for a moment Virginia was perplexed. It was so seldom he took part in any of the social meetings of the place, that her mind at once conceived the idea that there was an object in this visit, and if so—what?

She bowed to him, and smiled, but she did not pause in her playing, and until the end her swift thought was reviewing all possible reasons: it was of the tragedy of which she had had unsatisfactory glimpses, of the Princess's face as she left the room with the old man the previous evening, that she was thinking, when at last she approached him with all that seductive grace and charm which had vanquished little innocent Dolores.

"You are wondering why I am here," he said, as they sat together by the tea-table; "I who so seldom pay visits—even duty ones?" smiling.

"Ah, Excellency, do not deprive me of the delightful idea that I am the exception—the rare exception, in which pleasure and duty combine."

"Yes, Duty very seldom," he replied, "sets up housekeeping with Pleasure."

"It *is* an unnatural alliance," she added; "a marriage with a view to divorce."

"I never thought," he went on, "of your having friends. Wishing to say a word to you, this seemed a favourable opportunity."

"He had something to say, then—her conjecture was correct;" so ran her thoughts, whilst he was deciding that to attempt diplomacy with Virginia Shore would be a mistake. Seeing what he had seen, knowing what he knew, there was only one way in which to act, and that was, instead of ignoring her acquired knowledge, to accuse her of it, and show his recognition of the fact that her words had not been lightly spoken, but with intent.

"The moment is a good one for confidences, Excellency," she said, after that moment's pause, lifting her clear eyes from the teacups. "We are alone—practically," with a glance towards the two by the piano, then to the looped curtain, whence came the murmur of voices, now and then a laugh.

"That which Jerome has told you must remain a secret—useless to say so," he smiled, "to one of Miss Shore's well-known discretion."

Yes, this sharp sudden move was the best. She had expected some leading up to it, this swift attack she was not prepared for. Her eyes fell, the colour came in a faint delicate tinge into her colour-

less cheeks, and then, as if ashamed of the momentary inalertness, she looked up and spoke at once.

“Of course. Courts have taught us both that, Excellency, have they not? You allude, I suppose, to Jerome’s visit to Neuheim.” The colour had faded again, she was once more apparently herself.

“In this case,” his Excellency went on, “we have not only to keep a secret, but we must not allow it to be suspected that we possess one.”

“That does not leave us much enjoyment in its possession, does it?”

“Not from a *woman’s* point of view,” with a slight stress on the words; “power, even of an illegitimate sort, is not to be despised.”

Again the keen eyes fancied they detected a slight change of colour, but the light was growing dim in the room, and she did not avert her eyes.

“You always open out such interesting topics of conversation, that you are a perfect godsend. What should you call now—for a husbandless woman, of course—a legitimate sort of power to exert?”

“It is so much easier to define the illegitimate,” he answered. “When it is used to intimidate, that is a small use surely to which to put a great weapon; but I have my own theory on that subject also.”

“You will tell it to me, I am sure, Excellency?”

“It is the unusualness of possession that makes a woman anxious to use it, and show of what she is the possessor, whereas a man can rest content with the knowledge that it is close to his hand, if ever he

should stand in need of it. It is better," he added, after an almost imperceptible pause, "to be loved than feared."

"Yes, so people say," she assented, slowly, meditatively, as if reflecting over the justice of the proposition; "but aphorisms make themselves remembered, whether they are worthy of remembrance or not."

"It is difficult to fit them into our life at all the angles, but they are a pretty fair summing-up of the results of life on the majority," he assented.

"And how about the minority?"

"Oh, the minority," he laughed, "ignore the past, and frame aphorisms for another generation! But now, as I am here at such a fortunate moment, I suppose I may see the English girl. Tell me about her. If I have heard particulars, they have escaped me."

"I will post you myself, and then bring the girl to be cross-examined; you must be very gentle, she is only a child."

"Am I ever otherwise? Why," he said, mockingly, "I think if you took the votes of Ingelheim, no one would fear for the victim who had survived Miss Shore, and was afterwards given over into *my* tender mercies. We may be rivals," with a little bow, "but I fear I must relinquish any hope of victory."

"That is flattery, I suppose; but as I have every intention of some day entering the diplomatic service, I naturally seize the opportunity of profiting by your friendship."

“It is an old story, that of the pupil outdoing the master; sometimes the master dies of envy, sometimes he is satisfied with reflected glory. I am not envious, Miss Shore, so I shall look forward to my declining years being brightened with your successes. I am glad you have recognised in which direction lies your path to glory; sometimes people make such fatal mistakes in the choice of a profession.”

“Ah,” there was no change in her voice, but a slight, almost imperceptible trouble in her eyes, which it required those of his Excellency to observe. “Is Neuheim a finished episode, an interlude, or the final act of a drama?”

It amused his Excellency, this swift learning of his own lesson, this quick attempt to embarrass him in return with a sudden awkward question; direct questions are often difficult of avoidance, but under the circumstances there was nothing to be gained by hiding anything. She knew all the facts, of that he was assured, it was on that assurance that he had acted to-day.

“It was the third act,” he replied quietly, “but it is supposed that it has passed unobserved. Jerome,” after a slight pause, “will be cautioned.”

“People who don’t hear much current criticism,” she went on, as calmly as he had spoken, “often imagine that the first and second acts have been unobserved; it therefore does not occur to them that we vulgar outsiders are all waiting impatiently to see the curtain rise on the last scene, and that

we are more astonished and inclined to gossip when the lights are suddenly put out, and we are told there is nothing more. Why, for what else did we pay for the best places? It is no use even clamouring to have our money back, because," smiling, and leaning a little towards him — "because if we do, immediately a very polite, well-dressed, grey-haired gentleman is sent before the curtain to warn us of the futility of our hopes, the unreasonableness of our demands."

"It must be a very uncomfortable position for the grey-haired gentleman," was his only comment.

"I am sure it must," she assented, cordially. "You would, I feel certain, like to hear about my little guest, and what can I tell you? Where would you have me begin?"

"Give me a clue, at least. What is the 'has been' that has led up to the 'now is'?"

"My information is second-hand; it comes from Jerome, who has a way of gaining the confidence of the ingenuous. Though there does not seem much to tell. Apparently nothing has happened to her from the day she was found and adopted by a dull respectable English family, until Herr Laurentius captured her and brought her to live with the Desprez."

"And is she happy there?"

"She thinks M. Desprez is delightful—so kind, so good-tempered. Emilie has quite won her heart, and in addition has the romantic charm of being

the heroine of a love-story ; and to-day," pausing a moment, " she has set up a new idol, and begun to worship it."

" Not Jerome, I hope ? "

" No,—Virginia."

" Well, that is better."

" Is it ? " questioned Miss Shore. " Well, she will tell you all this, if you are discreet in your questions. Now, is an introduction still worth while ? I can tell you this, though," as his Excellency made a sign of assent, " I mean to take her up in return for her worship, though not only for that reason. To hear of such a monochromatic life is appalling, it is an incentive to prove there is more vivid colouring in the world."

" A change is not always a gain. To some people," with a little bow, " even scarlet is not as becoming as grey."

" But always grey, Excellency, think of it ! To know that what happened yesterday will certainly happen to-morrow, it is like living in a fog."

" It is the atmosphere of many lives—many contented lives."

" Ignorance, Excellency, therefore to be enlightened. Why, happiness, it is almost universally allowed, outweighs its purchase-price."

" And that is ? "

" Pain, I suppose."

" Even in happiness and its price," he replied, " there are degrees. If you can purchase what you

want at the cost of slight temporary discomfort, it would be unwise not to make the bargain; but, like most other things, it is a question of temperament."

Their last sentences had been exchanged as they moved across the room. Now they were standing close by the curtain, and as Miss Shore and her companion appeared in the aperture, Jerome rose, and with a hot nervous blush so did Dolores.

She was in doubt as to what she ought to do, and when Captain Shore had acquiesced, and had reseated himself by her, she had been a little afraid of the result of her own words and acts. As time passed, however, in the happiness of the moment, the anxiety was forgotten, until now it was recalled by Miss Shore's reappearance. Her words, however, were calming.

"Well, Miss Traherne, I hope Captain Shore has done his duty and amused you; he told me all about the adventure yesterday. It was fortunate, Excellency, was it not, that he should have found himself at Neuheim yesterday? Neuheim, hitherto unfamed in story, will wake up one day and find itself historical."

Ignoring her words, "Tell me," his Excellency said, turning to the girl, "what took you to Neuheim? Let us sit down here; you have found the snuggest corner in this charming room,—and tell me how it happened. And you," looking towards Virginia, "instead of pursuing historical researches, play to

us. Something light and cheerful, and suitable to me."

"Offenbach?"

"The very thing. We shall both then be in a familiar region,—I the listener, and you the player."

"Excellency, you are inferring——"

"I am inferring nothing. I am petitioning." She smiled—a smile that rested for a moment on them both, and disappeared, followed by Dolores's admiring eyes.

It did not need much, as Virginia had hinted, to draw forth her admiration in words—the wave of worshipful adoration that was moving her heart.

"She is most beautiful," she repeated, "I never imagined any one like her; and not only beautiful, but so clever."

From talking of her surroundings he led her on to speak of her own future—what were her aspirations, her fears, her hopes.

In a year or eighteen months, she confided to him, M. Desprez believed she would be able to sing in public; in the meantime she must work very hard, "for I am not at all clever, and I had not learnt much before I came here; but so much depends on my succeeding, that I should like to foresee the future."

"Do not wish that," the old man replied. "Trust and Hope are better companions than prediction."

She looked perplexed.

"You see," she began, "it does not matter so much

for others; but if *I* fail," blushing hotly, "I have no home—nowhere to go—no one to whom I really belong."

"That makes the present more important," with a slight stress on the word, "because the present is our own to make what we can of it, whereas the future is the uncertain, on which we may never lay a possessive hand."

"M. Lütz said something like that one day. He told me to strive for better success than merely to please, but that, you see, is what is really necessary."

"M. Lütz meant, I suppose, that there is false success and true; we should be sorry for a child if we saw it offered a golden crown and a tinsel one, and found it accept that which we knew to be worthless. M. Lütz is faithful to his own principles."

"Yes, he is very good, though it seems a pity——" She reddened a little, and paused uncomfortably, and his Excellency guessed she had chanced on a dangerous topic.

"One of these days," he said, kindly, "I shall hope to hear you sing, and in the meantime you must leave the future alone, and enjoy the present, and keep young and happy as long as you possibly can. Ah, here is some one in search of you, I think."

Brother and sister were standing side by side, so different when seen thus close together, it was

difficult to remember how alike they were when apart.

"Yes, Miss Desprez is talking of the necessity of departure," Virginia replied; "Jerome will find your cloak," to the girl, "it is by the piano, I think." And as they turned away, and his Excellency was saying good-bye, "Tell me first," she said, lowering her voice and coming a step nearer into the small dark anteroom, — "tell me what you think."

"What does that matter," he retorted, smiling, "when you have already decided?"

"But I like my opinions indorsed."

"Well, I indorse. I write my name in full across all you said; but I think,—mind I am only hazarding an opinion,—that the admission of fresh colouring should be done warily. I think, for instance, that more harmonising shades—than red—might be found." So saying, he smiled at her, where she stood straight and slight in the semi-darkness as a vivid scarlet flame.

"I will bear in mind what you say——"

"But will go your own way."

"I am not M. Desprez," she answered, sweetly, "I cannot go my own way, and pretend it is yours."

"There is something for us still to learn. It is certainly a useful accomplishment; but valuable as it is, we will, I hope, retain it only for our own use?"

"You fear I am going to initiate my little admirer into the mysteries of diplomacy. No, Excellency; and, to tell the truth, I don't think she would prove an apt pupil."

"Neither do I," he assented; "but change of soil and climate will sometimes work great and unexpected changes, which," he concluded, slowly, "would be a pity. It would be a pity, for instance," he went on, "if criticisms about the Desprez changed wholesome admiration into doubt."

"You think truly that worship of any idol is desirable?"

"For the worshipper, and for a time. There is one great advantage youth possesses, that almost its only duty is to respect authority; whereas, grown older, we have first to question the authority."

"There is certainly great and easily acquired peace in obedience, Excellency, but it is often the peace of a coward."

"Defiance is not always a sign of courage," he replied, "though it is sometimes a necessary accompaniment; but definitions of courage, or lessons in it, are not needed by Miss Shore. Good-bye; you flatter me by listening, and so delude me into talking unnecessarily—good-bye again."

"Which would Ingelheim consider the greater flattery, Excellency—your talking to me, or my listening to you? I leave you to decide," she said, smiling, as she held out her hand, and then turned to say good night to her other guests.

"You must come and see me again, Dolores," she said to the girl; "perhaps one afternoon M. Desprez will allow you to come and sit with me when I am alone. To-day I had no opportunity of hearing all I want to hear; you will petition him?" she said to Emilie; "he is easily reached in that way, I believe. I will sign a bond of 'no music,' and 'no company' either, only just myself."

Dolores's flush of pleasure was a gratifying answer.

"I *should* like it," she said; and again as she was leaving, "you will not forget," she said, wistfully, and Virginia promised she would not.

"I will write directly I am sure of an idle afternoon."

And happy in the promise, Dolores left with Emilie and Captain Shore; Antoine accompanied them, and on finding they were going to walk, went out with them into the dark night.

"The brougham had to meet my father," Miss Desprez explained, "and there is not really much rain. Dolly, put on your cloak," as the girl came out into the still soaking foggy atmosphere, "where is it?"

"Oh, here." Dolores laughed at her own carelessness, as she noted Captain Shore had it. "Is it worth while?" lifting her face to the dark sky.

"You very careless child," he said, as the other two took a step into the darkness away from them,

“pouring rain, and a risk of a cold and sore throat, and in addition your best dress spoilt.”

“Yes, it is my best,” she said, a note of soberness in the words. “I don’t suppose it would be improved by getting wet.”

He wrapped the cloak round her, and opened the umbrella.

“Now we can dawdle as much as we like,” he said, complacently; “for we are so well protected from the weather by this enormous umbrella that we shall scarcely know what is going on beyond it.”

But if they dawdled and were unconscious of the rain, or at least untouched by its saddening influence, it was not so with the other two.

“You are unhappy, Emilie,” the man said, directly they were aware of being alone, except for that other couple as much hid from view as if beneath a tent. “What is it? Anything new? You are not yourself to-day.”

“I am very anxious,” she answered—“anxious about your health, unhappy about the future, it all seems so hopeless; in part, I daresay it is the weather, there is something so gloomy and depressing about this persistent rain, it affects my spirits.”

“And mine. How dependent we are on Nature! I feel every smile and frown she gives.”

“Not like Miss Shore,” and Emilie smiled a little; “she is superior to Nature’s frowns and smiles alike.”

"Unimpressed by them at any rate," Antoine corrected.

"How does the opera get on?" Emilie questioned, a moment later. There was still, though now they were in truth alone, that nameless barrier which made conversation difficult.

"It grows," he answered, and into his eyes came that brilliance that little Dolores had seen and marvelled at, the brilliance that made the haggard worn face young. "Do you think it is vanity?" he went on, "but one day I believe that its music will be heard and appreciated—not now, not yet, but one day. Is it vanity?" he repeated.

"No, Antoine," she answered, tenderly, "it is the assurance of knowledge."

He took her hand in his and stroked it lovingly.

"You will hear it," he said, "you will understand it."

"Yes, I shall understand it as I understand you—through love."

Her voice was low, but he heard the words, and lifted her hand and kissed it.

"Emilie," he said, with momentary unaccustomed passion in his voice, "come to me. What does it all matter? Marry me, and leave this wearying life behind. Speak to your father, or let me; you are of an age to say, 'I will.' How can he prevent you?"

"Oh, I cannot," she sighed.

This was the next step; new decisions, new obli-

gations would arise as the consequence of these past meetings, and she could only sigh and say "Impossible," and all the time wonder what would happen next.

"I cannot insist, I never could against my father's wishes;" and the other equally determined voice, "I cannot forsake Antoine, I cannot, now especially that I see how ill he is."

The two voices speaking alternately, and to some vague far-off day the decision was postponed.

"Where does my duty lie?" she thought, despairingly, as she stood alone in her room that night by the open window watching the rain that still fell steadily down—"My father, old and lonely, and dependent on me for all home love; and Antoine dying—dying," she repeated, with a sob, "and needing care and tenderness, which only I can give. Where does my duty lie?"

And yet the Right is not a complicated question, though it sometimes seems so. Sometimes it simplifies it, if we put it as applying to others instead of to ourselves. But to Emilie Desprez no such analysis was possible. This was one duty, that was another; now they seemed to balance, and only her own heart gave the final additional weight, and that must be feared, because self-gratification was not in her nature.

Morbid questionings do not tend to settle these vexed points, but how teach a narrow, circumscribed,

loving woman that to please two opposite natures is not possible, that to displease one necessitates strife, and that honest strife is sometimes praiseworthy and necessary ; and that a battle fairly fought will often settle more than all the subtle diplomacy of the wisest.

CHAPTER XII.

“Ernst ist das Leben.”

THERE wanted but a few days to Christmas, and the little town of Ingelheim was busy preparing for it; the long dull autumn, with its constant unaccustomed rain, had given place, first to a snowstorm, which had been followed by days and nights of frost, which as yet showed no signs of departure. Day after day the sun rose and ran his short course through a cloudless sky, the bare branches of the trees hung down motionless under the heavy weight of snow. To the young and strong and healthy there was constant exhilaration and excitement in the sleighing and skating.

To Dolores it was entrance into a new life, for Miss Shore had been faithful to her promise, and had sent for her several times to the Palace, and when the frost set in, she had taken her out on the frozen lake, and had insisted on her learning to skate. Nervous and shy, the girl would have refused, but there was no refusing Miss Shore. Her objections were set aside, and before she had fully realised what

she was doing, she was standing very unsteadily upon a pair of skates, clasping Virginia's hand in one of hers, and with the other clinging with the energy of despair to Jerome.

"Jerome, you are so good-natured, you will teach her, I am sure," Virginia said. "Come, it is a shame she should not learn, and enjoy herself."

So Dolores's soft refusals were thrust aside, and in a very short time she was herself surprised to find how safe and happy she felt.

Captain Shore was a good teacher, and good-natured, as his sister said. He perceived the nervousness and shyness more clearly than his sister did, or perhaps only understood them better.

He took her away to a far-off, secluded spot, where there were fewer amused observers, and less danger of alarming collisions, and honestly set to work to teach her.

And teaching under some circumstances is not displeasing work.

When the pupil has only one wish—to learn, and only one thought—to express gratitude for the trouble the teacher is taking.

Emilie alone disapproved. She was a graceful skater herself; but when Miss Shore's invitations came, which of course included her, she made some faltering objections to her father, her eyes the while avoiding those which she knew, did she but turn her head, would meet her own. But M. Desprez pooh-poohed her words.

"Of course, go;" he was just leaving the room, but turned back when his daughter spoke. "Such lovely weather! And the frost is not likely to last, make the most of it. And Dolores," touching her head lightly, "is such a good hard-working little pupil that she deserves a holiday."

"Yes, yes," Emilie spoke dubiously, "but——"

"No buts," M. Desprez laughed; "you don't know any, do you, Dolly?" and at his words Dolores gave a sigh of relief, of which Emilie was well aware.

"Of course it is but natural," she said to herself. "It is fun, pleasure, amusement, just what all girls, all young people want—and she is only sixteen," but her own words did not calm her disquietude.

There had been a week now—one week of such pleasure, such happiness, that all Dolores's short life was coloured by it. The row of photographs looked at her reproachfully she imagined, so utterly had they at present sunk below the horizon.

She was for the moment idle,—her morning lesson was over. M. Desprez had announced himself well pleased, had foretold her future in glowing colours as he smoked a cigarette, and now she was standing at the window, watching, she scarcely knew for what—but for some sign, some messenger, which should foretell what the afternoon should be.

As she watched, there was the jingling of bells, and down the empty road appeared a sleigh. The bright harness flashed in the sunshine, the ponies tossed their heads, setting all the bells ringing, as

they stopped at the door, and Miss Shore herself stepped out, and up the snowy path.

But before she had time to ring, the door was opened, and Dolores stood awaiting her.

"Yes, it is you I want," she said. "Will you come? yes, I see you will. We are going to Ehrenberg. I have come to see M. Desprez, for fear he should say 'No' in a letter."

"Oh, you are *good, good*," Dolores cried, emphatically. "He is in his study," leading the way down a dark passage. "Here," pausing at the door—"here it is. Beg for me," she added, pleadingly, and Virginia nodded, then knocked, and at the loud "Come in," entered M. Desprez's sanctum.

It was not very hard to persuade him at any time, and under these circumstances, Miss Shore had very little doubt of success.

"We will take all care of her," she said. "It will amuse her—only my brother and I are going, and a friend of his. We shall drive to Ehrenberg, and be back by the time it is dark. Lady Ellesmere will be very glad to see the child, and I know the drive would please her."

"You are very kind," M. Desprez replied, "I have not the slightest doubt that Dolores will be delighted."

He wondered for half a minute what might be her object, and then answered the question himself—"Chaperonage."

Miss Shore was not a great favourite with other

ladies ; it might not have been easy to find a suitable one to accompany her on such a drive. "A friend of my brother's"—that might mean anything. But with M. Desprez curiosity, especially about outsiders, was the most trivial and passing emotion,—scarcely worthy, indeed, of such a definition. It had vanished again immediately, and he was gladly assuring his visitor of the pleasure she was affording, beaming reflectively himself at the thought of the day's amusement for Dolores. It was just the atmosphere he delighted in. To feel light-hearted and cheerful himself, with the consciousness that every one else was happy also—that the sun was shining royally on all.

He went himself to find Dolores, and tell her of her good luck ; but away from the fascination of Miss Shore's smiles, he was aware of a slight cloud in the sunshine, at the feeling that Emilie would not approve. Why ? he did not stop to wonder ; but for some reason, probably an unimportant one—there was no use after all in worrying over it.

He shrugged his shoulders at the thought that it was too late now, and called, "Dolores, Dolores !"

She was by his side in a moment, eager expectancy in her face.

"Yes, you can go," he said, kindly, subtly pleased at the improvement in her appearance when her cheeks were flushed and her eyes excited. "You are such a good child," he said, "that it is a pleasure to give you pleasure."

Dolores was conscious of tears in her eyes as she ran up to her room. They were all so good to her.

The photographs certainly looked at her reproachfully. Yes, *they* had been very good; it was not that she was ungrateful, but it was the warm demonstrative affection that she found so novel and so charming.

No, Emilie did not approve: she would not, or could not, say why; but she feared for this loving, tender-hearted child, thrust into a society, of which, in her three-and-twenty years, she had had opportunity to know the coldness and falseness; but she was not one to damp the girl's pleasure, when to prevent it was impossible. She came up to help her, directly she had learnt how matters stood.

The best frock was growing a little shabby. It had been in such constant requisition of late, even those skating-lessons had necessitated its appearance, that Emilie's thoughts and words were chiefly as to how it should be replaced.

"And you must have a warmer coat, Dolly. To-day," after a moment's thought, "yes, you shall wear mine—it will be very cold coming back."

It required a little persuasion to make Dolores realise this necessity, but Emilie was determined, and she smiled, as her father had done, as she noted the pretty colour in her cheeks, and how becoming was the rich dark fur about her throat.

"She is growing quite pretty," her father said complacently, as he stood by her side watching the

start. "Dress her up a little, and let her be a little excited, and she will pass quite for a beauty—on the stage. I'll tell you what, Emilie," with a sudden after-thought, "I shall get her a coat like yours with a dark fur collar for a Christmas present. I never saw anything more becoming."

The kind thought pleased Emilie.

"He is always so kind," she thought as she left him. It was a relief to think of that instead of—"What was she really afraid of?" she wondered. It was a shadowy trouble, so indistinct and faint, that she could not face it fairly, but it hovered in some indistinct fashion about Jerome Shore.

And yet it is to be doubted if she could have explored all the innocent hiding-places in Dolores's heart, whether she would have found as much feeling for the brother as there was for this slender graceful woman, by whose side she was now driving through the keen frosty air; this woman with the delicate face, clear-cut and cold as a cameo, in its setting of sapphire-blue velvet and rich sables. It was at this shrine she worshipped, admiring her beauty, listening to her talk. This was the dream-life in which she was living, and that this woman, so far above and beyond her, should have permitted the worship was in itself a daily miracle.

And Virginia enjoyed it.

M. Desprez was quite wrong in his interpretation of her motives. It was for her own pleasure she had brought the girl to-day, it was her companion-

ship she had wished. She had a motive in the visit but that was another matter, and bore little reference to the drive itself.

Jerome was not quite ready yet to think of it for himself, but his sister fully realised for him that shortly, with his good looks, good position, and good birth, matrimony might be a great help to him in his career. Matrimony, that is, of a suitable kind. To-day's visit bore reference to that coming time. Not anything distinct as yet, but handsome, well-born, rich girls are not always to be found at convenient moments, and therefore to be made much of when found. Jerome was one of those who would be most likely to drift into any line that was arranged by clearer-sighted vision, and Virginia had his well-being at heart. She knew, or fancied she knew, what he needed, and no trouble would have been too great to accomplish her ends. He was not always to be secured when the suitable moment had come, and therefore, when he himself suggested the drive and wondered where they should go, and she suggested the visit, and he only doubted, and did not say "No," she seized the opportunity, and shortly had made it all possible.

"Count Fernhof will go with you, I am sure," she said, "he is a great friend of the Ellesmeres."

It was as well, all things considered, they should not go alone. "And I will take Dolores."

"Yes, that is a good idea; only I don't think the Desprez will allow it."

"Oh, I will persuade them," Virginia answered, lightly, "M. Desprez is not adamant. I will go at once, and will drive her out, and meet you there—we can change partners for the drive home," she added, "so be sure and take Count Fernhof. I don't care about any of the others."

"All right," Jerome nodded. He had no doubt it would be "all right." Fernhof was infatuated enough, and it really did not seem unlikely that Virginia——

Brothers are not proverbially keen-sighted, and, besides, he had secured what *he* wanted. It would be delightful to introduce little unsophisticated Dolores to the charms of a sleigh-drive, nor was the visit itself likely to be dull. Miss Ellesmere was always amusing enough.

Yes; this was exactly what Virginia had foreseen and counted upon,—the long drive through the keen frosty air, which was in itself a tonic to her nerves and spirits, a physical pleasure and an excitement which alone were a delight; the presence, quiet, but appreciative and adoring, of little Dolores; the arrival at the grand old house, at present occupied by these distant relations of her father's, widowed Lady Ellesmere and her handsome daughter.

The two young men had already arrived, and, immediately after, there were explorations of the old haunted house with its picture-galleries and wonderful views, all to be seen and commented upon, just in the order that Virginia had prearranged.

Count Fernhof, in that infatuated state of boyish admiration that to walk by her side and listen to her remarks was all he cared for; whilst Frances Ellesmere, a type of English beauty, in those days little known in such quiet out-of-the-way places as Ingelheim, was ready to devote herself to Jerome, and amuse him with her vivacity and quickness, which had a touch of "smartness" that accented her every sentence, and gave her somewhat of the charm of a rough but amusing schoolboy. And Dolores? This also had been foreseen. That she would suit her young steps to stout old Lady Ellesmere's slow movements,—would listen to her stories about German servants and doctors, and the sad necessities which had driven her here to be near one of that useful class, the only one who had really understood her case; and her sighs and pants very soon suggested to Dolores that it would be better they should return to the drawing-room, and sit still there, a suggestion in which Lady Ellesmere gladly acquiesced.

"Take off your cloak, dear,—you are sure you don't mind. There is nothing to see, and it is terribly draughty in those long cold passages. We are much better here," with a complacent smile, as she drew her arm-chair closer to the open fire, behind the shelter of a high screen,—“now we can talk comfortably. You can tell me all about yourself,” which really meant listening to all Lady Ellesmere had to say about herself and her symptoms, and Frances also.

There was a great deal to say about her daughter.

"I don't like her manners," Lady Ellesmere sighed in confidential pants, "but I am old, and the world changes: it is the kind of manner that gentlemen like, for she is very popular; I never saw a girl so much run after."

And Dolores listened and nodded—words were not necessary—and now and then peeped round the corner of the screen, when Lady Ellesmere's quick eyes were turned to the fire,—and was guiltily aware that her thoughts kept wandering, and that her ears were strained to hear the sounds of footsteps, which still gave no sign of returning.

But at last—well, at last patience always is rewarded, if it is enduring enough; only it has a way with some people of prolonging the endurance until the reward has ceased to be attractive,—at last there were sounds of laughter and cheerful voices. Yes; those were Virginia's clear notes and Captain Fernhof's slow tones, and that was undoubtedly Miss Ellesmere's quick retort. Now the door was opened, and though still invisible, they were evidently in the room.

"Mother," Miss Ellesmere called, "where are you?"

"Oh, my dear," her mother shivered in reply, "do shut the door. Such a draught, and we were just getting so warm and comfortable."

"Warm and comfortable," echoed Miss Ellesmere, appearing round the screen. "Why, Miss Traherne is just as red as a hot coal. I am sure she did

not choose this corner—did you?” turning to the girl.

If she had not been red before, there was no doubt of it now, as, conscious of all the eyes turned upon her, and of Lady Ellesmere’s faltering apology, Dolores strove to unite politeness with truth.

“I will take Miss Traherne up to the top of the flag-tower,” Captain Shore quietly observed, “and then she will sigh to be brought back to the fire. Come,” he said, kindly, “put on your cloak, and I will show you all there is to be seen.”

“No, I will take her,” Miss Ellesmere said. She was a small-featured girl, with a close-cropped curly head and quick brown eyes, a bright colour, and so much that constitutes prettiness, that it was easy to forget the irregularity of her features.

There had certainly been a shade of eagerness in her voice, but then she had an eager impetuous way of speaking, and the next words were entirely without it.

“A woman is a far better cicerone than a man; probably you have already forgotten the story of the haunted gallery?”

“Forgotten it! why it is engraven on my heart. The lady with a dagger in one hand and her own head in the other; or, was that the occupant of the white chamber, and was it the priest with one red arm? You see, if a little muddled as to their whereabouts, I am quite correct as to my facts. Will you trust yourself to me, Miss Traherne, and run the

risk of mistaking the especial prowl of the especial object ? ”

He was standing up, evidently awaiting her, so was Miss Ellesmere, and if he was unobservant of her attitude, it had not escaped Virginia's eyes, and Dolores herself was painfully aware that it was not wished by Miss Ellesmere that she should go.

It was difficult for her to know what to do ; it seemed impossible to say “ No,” to invent an excuse never occurred to her ; besides, her happy eyes would have made it difficult of belief, and those who might have told her what to do, held their peace.

Virginia, talking a little apart to Count Fernhof, was amusedly watching the little scene, wondering if it was the forerunner of awakening jealousy, and Lady Ellesmere, sighing and shivering alternately, kept her eyes fixed on her daughter, some question in them not to be read by the uninitiated, but which Virginia deciphered to be an inexpert signal asking what she wished done.

It all took place in a minute, whilst Dolores stood reddening and paling in nervous anxiety ; but as generally occurs when a man wishes a thing sufficiently to exert himself to accomplish it, it is done his way.

Ignoring Miss Ellesmere's words and looks, except by a passing reference to the fact that once to the top of the flag-tower was quite enough for her, he took up Emilie's fur mantle, and wrapping it about Dolores moved towards the door.

"Come," he said, and Dolores obediently followed. "It is growing colder while we delay."

Miss Ellesmere said something about the way, her voice following them with explanations, and even Lady Ellesmere roused herself to urge they should not stay long.

"The view is the chief thing," she said, "and the picture-gallery, but after that, come back here: coffee will be ready, and I am sure you will be cold enough to need it."

With his hand on the lock, Captain Shore promised and agreed, but at the first break in the conversation he closed it—"Because of the draught," he said, in a low voice, to Dolores—"and because of the advice," he added, and smiled, "which I don't mean to follow."

Dolores laughed too, but nervously.

"They did not want me to go," she began; "I did not know what I ought to do."

"You did quite right," he replied. "To be obedient is the first duty of children, so I heard his Excellency say one day, or something like it, and his opinion is, as you know, final."

"Now that we have shut all the good advice and the directions for guidance in there, I will tell you that I have but the faintest ideas of the geography of the place. This is the picture-gallery, I know; but after that there will be all the excitement of exploring."

He opened, as he spoke, two great folding-doors,

and they entered into a long oak-floored picture-gallery.

"These works of art require much explanation, which I am unprepared to give, and besides, it is growing rather dark, so I think we will just say 'How do you do?' to these ill-favoured gentlemen and ladies, and hurry through, in the hope of finding something more lively."

"They are beautiful, I think," Dolores said, simply.

She looked around with delight, pausing constantly before one or other of the portraits. She preferred the portraits, or perhaps understood them better.

The little serious children, with their quaint old-fashioned garments; the grand ladies, gorgeous in brocade and jewels; the men, in powder and velvet coats, or standing in vivid brilliant uniform, sword in hand, whilst a battle raged in the background, of which they were apparently unconscious.

Captain Shore found it almost impossible to hurry her, but at last they had reached the further end, and were facing companion doors to those by which they had entered. They were locked, but he unturned the key, and they passed through them, finding themselves directly on a narrow dark staircase.

"This is a different way," he said; "we are exploring already. This stair, I believe, leads up to the flag-tower,—at any rate we will risk it."

It was very dark,—a flight below there was a small square entry or landing, dimly lighted by a coloured window,—except for that, total darkness.

“It must lead somewhere,” Captain Shore said, encouragingly; “it would be ignominious to go back and take the scorned advice, would it not? Let me go first.”

It was a very narrow, very steep, winding stair. As they went on, Dolores was aware that it was giddy work climbing like this. She panted a little, it was breathless work also, and besides there was something uncanny in the darkness, which increased as they went on.

“I should think the priest or the lady must live here.”

He had not spoken for a minute, and after this observation, he hurried on a turn or two: this was evidently not the accustomed way; it might be as well to see if the door at the top were locked, when her voice from below reached him, “Captain Shore!”

“Yes,” he paused and called back.

“Is it much further?”

Something in the tones told him how her heart was beating, how she was hurrying after him, and he checked the laughing reply that had risen to his lips, and as quickly as possible he was back by her side, holding out his hand, scarcely visible in the gloom.

“Take my hand,” he said, quietly; “it is horrid,

isn't it? I shall never want to explore again, and if it was not for pride, I should go straight back, and ask Miss Ellesmere to show us the way. But that would never do, when we are so nearly at the top, would it?"

Her small trembling hand was in his; he held it in a firm clasp, and the momentary nervousness vanished under the consciousness of his presence and the sound of his voice. Dolores laughed a little at the previous fear. They were at the top now, and the door was locked, as he had guessed—he lit a match, only to discover there was no key.

He gave a sigh of comic despair. "Some people are not born under a lucky star,—and I am one of them. Now we must go all the way back to the picture-gallery and start afresh. Don't you think that will be best?"

"Yes, by far the best."

"Miss Traherne, I am sure you are laughing. I must make certain." He took out the little box, and struck another match, and in the swift flame saw illumined in the darkness the soft eyes under their straight brows, the smile—there was no doubt about it—round the young fresh mouth. He looked a moment, it was a very sweet picture to have conjured up out of the darkness, and then he threw the match upon the ground and stamped it out in silence. In silence, too, he took her hand and began the descent.

But a minute later, "Tell me if you feel giddy,"

he said. "Some people do, going down steep stairs, and then we will stop and rest."

"No, I am not giddy," she answered, as she descended just a step behind him. She was so close he could hear the little quick breath she gave, and then a pause, and he knew that she blushed before continuing: "When we were going up—it was very silly—but I was frightened."

"There was not much to be frightened at, was there?" he said, quietly—the more quietly because he was aware his own heart was beating a little quicker, and because of that slight hand that rested so trustingly in his, the voice that spoke so confidently.

"It was the lady with the dagger," he said, and laughed—"yes, I am sure you thought you were going to be one of those lucky beings to whom she exhibits herself."

"But I should not like it."

"Well, there's no fear," he said, reassuringly, "because she never appears where there is a witness. There, take care, that is the last step. Now we have to decide afresh."

"I am so glad to be back in the light," Dolores said, in a tone of gratitude, and she sighed, an unmistakable sigh of relief.

The sigh was echoed as Captain Shore turned towards the coloured window. He also was glad to be back, even in such dubious light as this.

By the window there was a door, dimly enough

outlined in this vague twilight ; but, on closer examination, it proved to be a stout oak door, ornamented with iron nails and knobs, in a way that suggested bygone dangers ; but there was a key in this lock—it did not even need turning, for, as Captain Shore laid his hand on it, at the slight push it swung heavily open on its massive hinges, and they found themselves on the threshold of a low-ceiled, old-fashioned room, well-lighted with the cheerful glow from an open fireplace.

It was such a delightful change from the gloom and darkness outside into this warm atmosphere, that without a moment's hesitation they entered. Entering, Captain Shore at least realised where he was—they were approaching the little chapel. This was the priest's room, or had been in the days of the master of the house ; a few steps would now take them back to familiar ground. The room was untenanted, they could pass through it.

But almost as the idea passed through his mind, he was aware that in the great oak chair drawn up to the fire was seated a man. He had his back to them, he was gazing into the flames, so wrapped in his own thoughts that he was quite unaware of their approach. It would even be possible to turn and withdraw in silence without attracting his attention, but that did not seem right. It would be more polite to offer some apology for their intrusion.

“ I beg your pardon,” he began in German, and as he spoke, was aware of watching with swift rising

uneasiness the outline of the smooth dark head against the glow of firelight ; but before the uneasiness had taken distinct form, there was no further room left for doubt. At the sound of his voice there was a hurried movement, a startled repetition of his name, and he stood face to face with Prince Lesceynski.

“ You ! ” Captain Shore said, wonderingly, advancing a step nearer, “ what are you doing here ? ”

“ I am staying here,” Dorislaus answered in German, with a glance towards where Dolores stood in the background, frank curiosity in her eyes, “ but for many reasons I thought it best that you should not know it, so I asked Miss Ellesmere not to mention it.”

“ She was faithful to your wish, which I think was a very foolish one. It was entirely my fault that I found my way here. I was showing Miss Traherne over the house, and we have lost our way.”

He, too, remembered his little companion then, and turned towards her. For the moment he had quite forgotten her, but turning his head now, he recognised at once how uncomfortable she felt at her inopportune presence, and returned to her side to convince her that her fear was unnecessary.

“ Miss Traherne and I are friends,” he said, “ though we have not known each other very long ; and if you wish your visit here not to be known in Ingelheim, it is a secret with which you may safely trust her.”

She smiled at the words, and looked from one

to the other, as if to see whether Captain Shore's confidence were shared. The stranger's dark eyes sought hers, as if to discover for himself if she were trustworthy; but when their eyes met, "Yes," he said quickly, in English, "mademoiselle will not betray me, even though she cannot understand why there should be a mystery about such a trifle. As you are here, Shore, you will stay and speak to me; there is much you can tell. I do not wish Miss Shore to know I am here," he added, after a pause.

"No one, not even Virginia, shall know it from us," Jerome answered, with a glance which included Dolores in the promise. "It is our secret."

Having so spoken, they turned to the fireplace, and Dorislaus began some hurried questions.

"Captain Shore," Dolores said, in awkward constrained tones, "may I go to the picture-gallery and wait there for you?"

Poor child, he was sorry for her embarrassment; it was very uncomfortable for her, but to send her away would certainly not be safe. At any moment Virginia might come in search of them, and the picture-gallery was the first place to which she would go.

But there was so much to say, to hear, and it was so delightful to be with his friend again, and perhaps learn the hopes or the reason that had brought him there; and it was all so impossible to discuss with any third person present, that there was a

slight tinge of regret as he admitted the infeasibility of the idea.

“Mademoiselle, would you mind waiting for ten minutes in the chapel?” This was Prince Lescynski’s proposition. “We can lock this door,” he explained, “and we are then free from interruption,” and Dolores, only too glad to see any way of escape from the awkward consciousness of being an undesired third, gladly complied.

He opened the door and stood aside for her to pass out, and then walked by her side through a dark gloomy stone passage which led into a small chapel.

The cold wintry sunshine was stealing in through a gorgeously coloured window, throwing faint shadowy reflections of its brilliance on to the white stone pillars and dark oak carvings. It was a relief from the previous darkness, and Dolores, still a little excited from her previous experiences, was glad that so it should be.

“I do not like banishing you from the fire,” he said, with grave courtesy; “but you look kind and good, and I am sure will believe that if I saw any other possible way of speaking to Captain Shore, I should not adopt this one. It is important,” he went on, “that no one in Ingelheim should know that I am here, so I denied myself the pleasure of seeing Jerome, my greatest friend; the Fates, you see, have willed it otherwise, but you will understand the importance of silence. And patience, I am

afraid," he added, as he turned away, "but we shall return very shortly."

He thought of her for a moment after closing the chapel door, even as Captain Shore was thinking also, both with something of the same regret that the banishment appeared necessary, and then a minute later she was entirely forgotten, even as the shadowy regret she had inspired, as they stood side by side in the low firelit room.

"Only a quarter of an hour," Jerome said, taking out his watch and placing it on a table as a reminder. "They will give us so much law, and then they will set off in pursuit; but perhaps by that time you will have decided that secrecy is a mistake."

"No, Jerome; I have not accepted it thoughtlessly, and so I tell you first that I have nothing to say about myself. It is better, I mean, that you should know nothing, where I am, or what I am doing."

"You are not contemplating committing fresh unconventionalities, I hope."

Dorisslaus smiled. "No, your mind may be at rest. At present I am contemplating nothing."

"Safe—and dull."

"I feel dull," the other man assented.

"I am sorry," Jerome answered. "I like violent, excitable people—I suppose because they provide what I am unpossessed of. But I daresay," he added, "it is much railway travelling that is to blame; you will probably return to your former state after a little rest."

“No, never!” Dorislaus spoke passionately, “the most violent nature wears itself out in time,—on that supposition, I am worn out! Tell me,” leaning a little nearer, “what is going on over there? What are you doing?”

“Masked balls, Christmas gaieties, a new operetta of Desprez, everything that is possible to banish thought.”

“And——” Prince Lescynski paused.

“And do we succeed, you wish to ask? Well, God knows, Dorislaus! I don’t. I suppose,” he added bitterly, as the other made no comment, did not lift his eyes from the blaze,—“I suppose coronets and honour and rank provide a certain amount of satisfaction, at least sufficient to enable their possessors to live very comfortably without any other sort.”

“It is not like you, Jerome, to be bitter.”

“It is an individual case that is causing it, if it be so, and probably I am a type of the rest of the world,” he answered, shortly. “Women,” with that large comprehension of the whole sex caused by the shortcomings of one member of it; “women are not worth the sacrifice of a man’s career, when the rubbishing et-ceteras of rank are weighed, and prove heavier than his devotion.”

“I cannot argue,” Dorislaus said, gently. It was Jerome who spoke hotly and angrily now. “We do not think alike on this subject; it would be difficult for me to express in words what I feel. I have fought through a good deal since I saw you

last. Marriage is so much in a woman's life," he added, abruptly, "that it must mean all or nothing. They are seldom strong enough to make much of their lives apart from circumstance."

He turned away as he spoke, and paced up and down the length of the long room.

He was changed, Jerome realised—changed since that last despairing night when they had parted; it angered him to recognise it—angered him tenfold when he thought of the woman to whom the change was due. The masks and revels and gay doings out yonder, and this man eating his heart out in solitude and grief—and it had been her fault. She had encouraged him, and smiled at his passion until it had grown unmanageable, and then—had bid him begone when the hour of explanation had arrived. His thoughts roused him to unwonted anger. "Coquette," he thought, angrily. "Coquettes always," he said aloud, "and when they are asked to take the consequences, cowards in addition."

Dorislauß smiled at his vehemence, and returned to his side in the fireglow,—and at the smile, the little puff of anger died away, and there arose a swift vision of the girlish face that had appeared for a moment out of the darkness, the tender innocent eyes, the fresh smiling mouth, again in his own he felt the slight clasp of confiding fingers: it was a reproachful answer to his words, which, after all, were perhaps of narrow application. There

were girls, ay, and women also, who would never give a false word or look—women with whom no weighing was possible, who were willing to give their love, themselves, their all, not even pausing to note what had been tossed into the other scale,—into such a woman little Dolores would grow.

“You must go,” Dorislaus said,—“I must not keep you, and besides, that poor little girl will be frozen down there alone.”

“Yes, I must fetch her.”

Jerome spoke, rapidly moving towards the door with a feeling of penitence, for it had suddenly flashed across his mind that perhaps the loneliness of the chapel might be almost as disagreeable to her as had been the ascent to the tower, and he felt that they had, after all, rather sacrificed her to their own convenience.

“But I shall return,” he said; “no, there is no use refusing—I shall come without fail on Christmas Day, and stay with you for some time.” Prince Lescynski’s refusal was weak. After all, what did it matter! it was only Miss Shore’s knowledge of his presence here that he instinctively shrank from.

“Yes, come back, Jerome,” he said; “I shall look forward to seeing you.”

Left in the chapel, Dolores had felt a certain regret when the door had closed and she found herself alone. It was childish and silly, she knew, but she trusted her imprisonment would not last for very long. It was a beautiful little building; and ignorant as she was,

she recognised the perfection of the slender pillars, the glorious varied lights that were shining in vivid purples and crimsons through the western window on to the figure of the warrior, whose crossed feet indicated he had taken the journey to the Holy Land.

Dolores stood long by the reclining Crusader, there was something attractive in the quiet mailed figure, —underneath were carved some half-effaced words in Latin, which she could not understand, and which were to this effect, “Life is a sturdy foe.” But here now he was conquered, and the conqueror was at rest.

By his side, glorified by the same rich light, was another tomb,—this one very white and new compared with the battered discoloured marble of the other. It dated only from ten years back, and was full of the pathos of recent sorrow. A white-veiled woman, standing with folded wings, sad type of the angel of Death, and holding one by either hand, two little, eager, happy children, fading flowers in their hands, thus sudden had been their call from the meadows of life where they had been playing,—and yet no reluctance in the swift obedience to the call; only confidence and trust, as they looked up to the veiled face above.

“Aloys and Despard. Given to me the same day; called away three years later.”

On to these words the glory fell, illumining these little ones, who had never known the warfare, even as on him who had fought it out.

The battle, for these babes had been within the narrow space of their mother's heart; and Dolores was glad when by-and-by in her wanderings she came across a tablet let into the wall, which told that Marie, Countess of Ehrenberg, slept here, aged twenty-eight. She did not long survive her two sons, who were drowned in the lake. These words Dolores made out with some difficulty, partly because her knowledge of German was not very fluent, and partly because this stone was on the darker side of the chapel. Above it drooped long tattered flags and banners, their torn folds almost reaching to it. All the glory was opposite, enveloping the battle-wearied warrior and the young eager children; here, where rested the mother's broken heart, it was still and dark, only the emblems of glory drooped above her, the well-worn emblems, that had been carried on many a well-fought field, had waved above many a gallant soldier, had been wrapped about the dead, and had found their last resting-place here, to wave above the quiet spot where slept a desolate lonely mother.

Something of this hung about the place, something of this peopled the lonely spot with ghosts, and sent Dolores now and again to the door to listen for approaching footsteps, when the banners rustled overhead, and the swiftly moving light passed further along the walls.

As for the twentieth time she held open the door and peered out into the gloom, there was a sound

above, the descent of rapid footsteps, and Jerome Shore's grey eyes were looking anxiously towards her, the notes of his voice also anxious as he spoke. "I am afraid I have been a long time,—are you tired of waiting? What a horridly cold place!" with a slight shiver as he stepped inside, "I suppose no one ever comes here now."

"It is beautiful," Dolores said, simply, "but it is lonely—I am glad you have come. I was listening at the door," and she smiled a little, "hoping to hear voices."

"It was very unkind," he asserted, and he felt a prick of conscience at the remembrance of how completely he had forgotten her. "Well, now, let us be off, and leave the cold and gloom behind."

"Tell me first, please, what this means?" She pointed as she spoke to the defaced words about the tomb of the warrior. He knelt down in the glow of rich light that fell through the coloured window, and strove to pick out the lettering, and then explained as well as he could the meaning of what he had deciphered, she standing beside him the while; the light falling across them all alike, enriching the young eager life-tints of the man, glorifying the calm repose of the resting soldier.

But it was not of the Crusader Jerome Shore was thinking as they mounted the stone staircase, the words of the quaint old inscription running in his head, "Life is a sturdy foe;" but of Dorislaus Leszynski.

He spoke of the chapel to him at once, with this thought in his mind.

"Yes, I often go there, sometimes at night—these moonlight nights the chapel is well worth a visit. But you must not stay. Good-bye."

He took Dolores's hand in his, and smiled at her in grave courteous fashion, then clasped Jerome's in silence; but when they had gone, and the door was closed between them, he opened it once again to say low and quickly, "Jerome, come back—no, not now," and he smiled. "Another day, I mean. I am not as changed as I hoped," he added, "I suppose; but at any rate, having seen you, and knowing you are so near, I cannot resist begging of you to return."

"Do not fear;"—Jerome's hand rested on his shoulder,—“I do not want you changed—to me,” he added; “I shall return.”

He was silent after that, silent whilst they walked through the gallery, and when he opened the doors, it was to find themselves face to face with the rest of the party. Fanny Ellesmere a little in advance, and behind her, sauntering slowly, pausing now and again, the other couple. Miss Ellesmere's quick eyes glanced from one to the other, while she uttered some exclamation of surprise.

"Only seen this!" she said. "Oh, you found the door locked on that side, of course. That comes of refusing an experienced guide, Captain Shore."

"You have seen him," she said in a lower tone,

moving further away. "Of course it is a folly, an insanity, but he asked us not to tell you that he was here."

"I am coming back to see him another day," Jerome answered. "I am humouring his follies," smiling a little, "but I have promised not to tell my sister."

"She is very observant and discerning," Miss Ellesmere remarked, slowly, her eyes lifted to the picture above her, "and Miss Traherne is not. I do not think there will be any need for you to tell her when you return home."

"Oh, Fernhof is going to drive Virginia home. I have promised to take Miss Traherne with me."

"A much better plan," she said, brightly. "She does not look expansive," she went on, glancing in the direction of Dolores; "I do not think she would mean to be confidential, but Virginia is very——" she paused.

"Extractive," Jerome added, and they both smiled.

"Wait here a few minutes," she said, "and I will run and warn mother not to ask awkward questions, or better still, employ the time in taking Miss Traherne the right way up to the flag-tower. You cannot mistake it now," pointing to the staircase, "and I will go and order coffee."

Virginia's eyes had noted the little conversation, —had been well aware of Miss Ellesmere's anxiety during the absence of the other two, the willingness

with which she had accepted the proposition they should start in pursuit.

Lingering on the staircase, listening to Count Fernhof's remarks, commenting on them at the right place, she had known quite well of the meeting in the picture-gallery, the low sentences that had followed, the way in which Dolores had been allowed to move aside whilst the other two talked.

She smiled at Dolores as she passed her, and at the smile Dolores flushed a little in proud pleasure, and turning a backward look, she surprised from her a glance of loving admiration.

"You have won that little girl for a slave," Count Fernhof said, watching also, there was something attractive in the frank homage.

"She is in love with me," Virginia said, lightly.

"There is not much cause for wonder in that," he replied.

"That was the self-evident rejoinder," she said, more coldly, "so I have only myself to blame for laying myself open to it."

"And the evident rejoinder——" he began—

"Is sure to be commonplace," she replied, quietly, "and that no one could desire."

CHAPTER XIII.

“Friendship begins with liking or gratitude.”

It was very little later that they started on the homeward drive, but the sun had already set, the short winter twilight was closing in.

“Jerome will drive you home,” Miss Shore told Dolores as they stood together on the steps. “Wrap her up well,” she added, turning to her brother; “do not let her catch cold, or I shall be blamed.”

Dolores watched her as she settled herself down in her corner, a beautiful woman, in her rich velvet and furs, well calculated to awaken admiration in older brains than those of a girl. Those of Count Fernhof, for instance,—the admiration in his eyes was almost as frank and *naïve* as he drew the sable rug about his companion, and noted the harmonious colouring.

Then they were off, and Jerome turned to Dolores. To tell the truth, it was not of her he was thinking, and when she was in the sleigh, and he saw that his sister had disappeared, with a few words of apology he re-entered the house.

"Fanny!" he called, opening the door, and as she hurried towards him, "I have come back," he went on, "to say I shall return here to-morrow, or the next day—probably I shall come by train, or perhaps ride."

"Let the way depend on other people," she replied, "but anyhow, come; we shall be very glad to see you. Stay and dine," she added.

"Thanks. Yes, very likely I will, but I want to talk with him, and find out what he means to do."

He shook hands quickly, and hurried back to where Dolores awaited him.

The little delay had made a difference; it was now nearly dark, and he took the reins in silence, and started quickly with a view to retrieve lost time.

On his outward drive he had looked forward to driving Dolores back, had been aware of pleasurable anticipation, but now it was all forgotten. His thoughts were entirely with Dorislaus, there was scarcely any reality in the girl's presence.

Dolores, for her part, had but one fear, that his silence included any idea of her speaking of that which she had learnt.

Little as she could guess as to the cause of the secrecy, yet the anxiety for it had been evident enough. After all, they did not know her, and possibly feared indiscretion on her part.

Three milestones had slipped past before his conscience prodded Jerome Shore up to a recognition

of the fact that his own anxieties were preventing him from entertaining his companion, and he turned to her, saying the first thing that came into his head.

"It is almost as dark as it was on the tower stairs, but not as frightening," he added. "The only thing that could happen here would be that we were upset, and that, I trust, is not likely."

"It would be better than seeing a ghost," she answered.

"Do you know, Miss Traherne, I am afraid you are a little coward."

"I don't mind *real* things," she answered evasively.

"I do," he drily replied, "they hurt a great deal more." He was silent a minute, and then with sudden expansiveness, "It is very disappointing to have our drive spoilt; but, to tell you the truth, all the cheerfulness has been knocked out of me by meeting——" He paused. The name had been avoided—it was an additional security that she should not learn it. Reaching it thus, he stopped abruptly, and then, looking down, met the sweet gentle eyes lifted to his under the shadow of the velvet hat—the same eyes, the same expression that he had seen by that momentary flicker of light on the old stairway. The pause, the reason for it, flashed from him to her, and she strove to fill up the gap, and deprive it of awkwardness by saying something.

"You cannot feel cheerful when you know your friend is in trouble—it is worse, too, because you cannot speak of it."

The remark was so crude, so unlike the comments of those with whom his lot was cast, that a reply was not easy; but it had opened the way for her to say more, and she went on at once—

"I wish I had not been with you this afternoon,"—her tones were nervous,—“though I do not think it really matters. I scarcely know any one in Ingelheim, and Emilie never asks questions. Besides, you know I have promised not to tell—and I don't know his name, so that you need not be uneasy."

When her soft nervous voice was silent, he leaned towards her in quick impulsiveness. "His name is Prince Dorislaus Lescynski," he said; "do not think we don't trust you."

She smiled,—a grateful pleased smile, as she recognised the confidence the words held, but it was only gratitude and happiness. There was nothing in the name itself, she had evidently never heard it.

The momentary impulse gratified, he was glad to realise this, not for himself—he trusted her implicitly—but it might annoy Dorislaus, the confidence anyhow might be difficult of explanation. To Dolores it seemed that to have won such recognition of her trustworthiness was the proudest, happiest moment of her life. Small wonder her cheeks flushed and her eyes grew dim.

After this, conversation was easier. Jerome had

swung round again into the former groove: he seemed to have left Dorislaus and his brooding sorrow—which had altered and saddened him—far behind, with the other ghosts that haunted Castle Ehrenberg.

He was once once more under the influence of this fresh young nature, which was only true and frank, and as yet unaware of the difficulties of the world, beyond the home. And he was so young himself; it was so easy to echo her laughter, smile back at her smiles, and to be only aware that they were alone under the dark starlit skies.

Once again only he alluded to Dorislaus—abruptly, inexplicitly,—“It is a mania his insisting on no one knowing he is there;—a mania to which, however, we must agree, because he is in trouble and unable to judge wisely; but never believe anything against him, whatever you may hear. I, who know him so well, tell you, he has never in all his life done anything to be ashamed of. He has been unlucky and unwise, perhaps, but that is all; though,” he added, “I daresay you will find many people who think differently. But you will *know* it is false.”

“Yes, I shall know,” she answered, “because you have told me.”

Even from this young ignorant girl the words pleased him. Of late, many a suggestive word, or worse still, jeering laugh, had reached his ears, when Dorislaus’s name had been mentioned.

After that, with that ready kindness which was

the chief note in his character, he talked only of such things as might interest her. The coming Fancy Ball held a great fascination for her.

"Oh, how I should like to see it, or even some of the dresses!"

"Would you? I daresay Virginia would favour you so far. Have you suggested it?"

"No, I should not like to do so."

"Well, I will. Is not that brave of me?"

"It is very kind," she answered. "But perhaps she might not like it, so I will not think of it."

"Oh, it shall be managed, never fear. You shall come up to Virginia's room—Miss Desprez can bring you—and you shall see us in all our glory."

"It is a secret, of course, what every one is to wear?" she queried.

"Supposed to be," he assented, striving to remember any talk that had reached his ears. "The Princess's dress is an open secret, she is to appear as the 'Grey Lady.'"

"I should not like to do that, if I were she."

"Why not? Do you think she will avenge herself on the human being who copies her toilet?"

But Dolores could not explain.

"Virginia has kept her intentions a secret even from me," he went on, "which has been, I daresay, wise, because if I had known I should have now told you. But mine you shall be specially privileged to learn, although no one has heard of it, not even Fanny Ellesmere."

The laughter in his eyes was apparent as he looked down in the faint starlight.

"She, Miss Ellesmere, was very anxious I should go as Jester to her Folly, but I refused the flattering offer. It would not have been becoming, I am sure; and I am going as the Huguenot. In Millais's picture, you know," he added, when he saw the doubt in her face, a doubt his words did not remove.

He was aware of that directly, her ignorance of common things was constantly surprising him, but there was no expression of it in his voice.

"You have never seen it? To tell the truth, neither have I, but the photograph suffices for the purpose. They have a very good one at Schmidt's; we will stop there on our way, and you shall have a copy to show you what to expect."

"Thank you," she said, shyly, with a hot blush, brought there partly at the recognition of her ignorance,—for she was instinctively aware she had displayed unexpected ignorance,—and partly with pleasure at the promise.

The great print-shop was all lit up when they stopped at its doors; passers-by, attracted by the pictures in the window, were crowding round to gaze, as Captain Shore jumped out of the sleigh, and then held out his hand.

"Come, Miss Traherne, we are late, I am afraid; but fortunately so late that stopping here won't make any difference."

His words recalled a fact which had been com-

pletely forgotten. Late, yes, of course it was late, but what did it matter! The present happiness pushed far into the background every other feeling.

Fortunately, Herr Schmidt himself was in, and in answer to Captain Shore's question produced a large copy of the picture in question. Coloured too, so Dolores was enabled to form a conception of the proposed costume; but whilst Captain Shore commented on it, he was well aware that his remarks conveyed little or nothing to her, the word Huguenot was apparently familiar, but of the story itself she knew nothing.

He told it to her afterwards, steadying the horses' pace to a quiet trot through the brilliant streets. In the hard light of the gas-lamps he could see her eyes softening with interest as he told his story, and she realised all the tragedy that lay under its apparent simplicity.

In her hand was the photograph he had given her; she drew it from its cover as he spoke, and looked down at it in the dim light.

"It seems almost unkind," she said, "to copy his dress for a Fancy Ball, does it not?"

"After all, it is only a story," he said, more lightly, his own voice had saddened a little as he spoke, "so I think we are justified in profiting by it."

"And it will be very becoming—it is a beautiful dress," she answered.

"Well, you shall judge of that."

"I wonder," and she sighed, "if I shall. I am afraid it is too good to come true."

"Oh no, it is not," he answered. "Don't imagine that, and don't doubt, because that looks as if you had not confidence in me, which would be very painful to my feelings."

"No, I am sure you will try," she replied; "but for fear you do not succeed——"

"Oh, I always succeed," he answered lightly. As he spoke they were nearing the house, in the narrow roadway opposite the Palace entrance.

"Good night," he said, when they stopped, taking her hand in his; "it is so late that I will not come in, I will just wait here until the door is opened, and I know you are safe."

She hesitated a moment, in some doubt as to what form of thanks would be most appropriate, but after all only repeated his "Good night," lifting glad shy eyes the while she sped swiftly through the little garden; her heart beating quickly, in her hand, tightly clasped, the picture,—through the garden and up the steps to the house.

Apparently the sleigh had been heard, for while her hand was yet stretched out to the bell, the door was opened, and Emilie stood in the entrance.

"Dear Dolores, how late you are! I thought you were never coming. I have such a glad surprise for you. Mr James Traherne is here."

CHAPTER XIV.

“There was a careless voice that used to sing,
There was a child—a sweet and happy thing.”

ALL through these weary months of separation, whenever his mind had not been preoccupied with work, it had been to this visit the thoughts of Jem Traherne had been turned.

He did not allude to it in his letters—it might not be easy of accomplishment, there were moments when it seemed impossible; but it was a promise, and unless fate were stronger than he, he knew, or thought he knew, that Dolores would be counting on its fulfilment.

And he had conquered, despite overwork and short holidays, and, harder still to combat, his mother's disapproval, he had made his way hither, travelling day and night to lose no time, well aware that, with the utmost carefulness, one short week was all he had to give her.

During all the journey he had pictured to himself her pleasure in his arrival, the relief of seeing one of her old home, after this long enforced foreign

companionship; and there had been a sense of disappointment when he learnt, on his arrival, of her absence. She must have expected him to-day; though later, the first moments over, he guessed that she had interpreted his silence to mean that he had found his promise impossible of fulfilment. He smiled at the idea,—there were not many things in which he could recall being beaten.

With Emilie Desprez he sat and talked; her father was out, and from her he learnt all there was to learn. Not much—very much the same story as her letters had already acquainted him with. Of the friendship with Miss Shore she spoke but little: she was English, she had taken a fancy to the girl, and had been kind to her. It was a change in the dull routine of her life. Of Jerome, not a word. Miss Desprez was aware that if she mentioned his name there would be that shadowy note of disapproval which was always lurking in the background of her own consciousness, and she knew that those steady eyes would recognise the fact and be alarmed. She hesitated, the moment passed, and his name was not spoken.

Shortly after there was the jingle of bells through the still frosty air. Jem rising, pushed back the curtain, and saw the slight figure hurrying up the garden slope, and caught a vague glimpse of a man's form bending forward following her movements.

He turned, a question on his lips, but Miss

Desprez had disappeared, and a second later he was standing by her side in the doorway, with Dolores's arms about his neck, her kisses on his cheek.

Yes, this was the moment to which he had looked forward the whole year. This was the slight dark-eyed child of whom he had so often thought—and yet it was not quite as he had imagined it; but then our imagination is apt, unless held in check, to run away with us.

She was very little altered, scarcely any taller; her cheeks were burning from the frosty air, and in contrast with the velvet of her hat, and the dark fur about her throat, the rich colour made her more nearly handsome than he had ever before thought her. This surged through his mind, whilst she stood looking up at him, saying little, her words were always so few, and then Emilie spoke—

“You had better take off your hat, Dolores, and then you can take Mr Traherne into the morning-room, and hear all the news. There is still an hour before dinner.”

Dolores obeyed—a little glad to escape. It was so long since she had seen him—he was so quiet—so old—with a little pause between the sentences; so difficult to talk to—she wished she had known he was coming. And then a rush of gratitude and self-reproach mingled, as she recalled his promise in the study at home, and how little she had thought of it since.

His photograph was distinctly reproachful in the

faint gaslight as she opened the door. She walked over, and stood before it whilst unfastening her cloak, and then she took the new picture out of its cover and placed it amongst the others.

It was of the Huguenot's story she was thinking as she ran down the stairs to meet Jem Traherne in the morning-room.

Once there, the excitement of the afternoon faded a little under the influence of his presence. There were so many memories, fading a little, but yet easily revived by the sight of his familiar figure.

This was once again the stronger reality. It was not easy for her to talk or explain; but his questions soon drew from her all he wished to know. As for his own prospects and hopes and fears, they were less easy of enumeration. All these late weeks, whilst planning this visit, it had been of his own success he had pictured himself talking, for success was within reach—at least, he had set his foot on the first step of the road, and to such a man the first step assured, there was little doubt as to ultimate achievement. And success was very dear to him: it meant not only gratified ambition, and the consciousness of making the best use of time and talent, but, in addition, it was the answer to all those angry reproachful words that had been such a trial to his young life.

This offer he had received, flattering to one so young, was the answer he could fling at his little

world. "See at least what others think, and learn to judge accordingly."

There is much besides pride or vanity which is gratified by such a position. The ignorance that despises knowledge it cannot understand, may be moved to respect when it sees that it stands in a minority.

But flattered and pleased as he was, he had insisted on his own terms, and they were a fortnight's holiday before he started. It did not seem very much to ask, with two years in South America to follow, but Jem Traherne knew what he risked when he announced his decision.

His employers hesitated and strove to change his decision, and when they found that was impossible, gave in, and postponed his departure, because, as they agreed amongst themselves, such a man was not to be picked up in a hurry—and Jem recognised with a sigh the relief he felt that this great chance was not to escape him, and that in addition he had kept his promise to Dolores.

He had succeeded ; everything had turned out as he had desired—nay, as he had expected—there was no change in her, or if there were, it was so slight as to be scarcely noticeable ; nothing more than the faint promise of dawning womanhood, giving a greater sense of immaturity to the charm of girlhood, and yet——

Yet he was conscious of a passionate resentment that so it should be.

What had he expected these months would do for him ?

Conscious of his own injustice, for his disappointment was certainly due to no shortcomings on her part, he could only strive that she should not notice it ; he kept the talk about everyday matters, answering her little questions about those at home and the slight changes in the village. She did not ask any direct question about himself or his work, and no opportunity arose, or so it seemed to him, of speaking of his future. So when night came, and he went to bed, the great secret was still hidden away in his breast,—the great secret which he had pictured as the prelude to so many other topics which they two were to have discussed in this old German town, topics which should signify her future as well as his, but which now seemed further off than ever.

He was not always self-confident ; he had his hours of doubt, like most of his fellows, and it was of himself he doubted when he stood in his room that night, the visitors' room, which Emilie had prepared for him.

“ I thought I was right in waiting before—and to-night what could I have said that would not have set a gulf of separation between us for ever. If I speak now, she either promises herself in ignorance, or the gulf is fixed between us ; if I wait till my return two years hence, she will have learnt more,—probably from another,—and will know the value of her love for me.”

He thought of her soft little good-night kiss. How much to risk for so little assured gain.

Next morning he awoke to the doubts that had stood by him till he slept; they were still in attendance when he met her, so fresh and happy, so full of her past day's pleasure, of the possibilities that were yet in store.

Sunday passed, and then came Christmas Eve, which was to be devoted to the small purchases which Jem was to take to those at home, and the short winter day was passed at her side, while she showed him all there was of interest in the little town.

He took her to church on Christmas Day. This was a special pleasure, because as a rule she went with Emilie to the French Protestant service, and the well-known familiar words gladdened her heart.

The service was held in a small chapel, decorated in honour of the day with greenery and scarlet holly-berries. There were not many English present. Captain and Miss Shore attracted Jem's attention, recognising, as he did at once, Virginia from Dolores's description.

Afterwards, when they stood once more in the street, in the bright frosty sunshine, Miss Shore, noting the girl, sent her brother to fetch her.

He joined them just as they were turning away, and shaking hands with Dolores, glanced inquiringly towards her companion.

"It is my brother," she said, a little nervously, as one unaccustomed to the ceremony of introduction, but that was all, Jem observed.

Her brother! No slightest shadow of the unreality of the relationship had ever touched her.

"It was only to tell you," Miss Shore said, kindly, "that it is all right about Friday. I shall be only too pleased to exhibit my costume to such an appreciative person. It is a secret—the dress I mean—because if Jerome once knew, so would every one else, so you must wait till Friday."

She smiled and nodded, and drove away through the snowy streets, her brother by her side.

"That of course is Miss Shore's brother?" Jem questioned, as they turned homewards. There was a momentary fear of he knew not what, as he put his question, but it vanished as he met Dolores's happy trustful eyes.

Purely happy, purely trustful, nothing else to fear, but—the doubts crowded round closer than ever. Nothing to fear, but certainly nothing to hope—on what indeed had he been building?

And so the few short days, so eagerly looked forward to, passed in trivialities, and he woke to realise it was Friday, his last day, and that now all continuance of this unusual doubt must come to an end, and before six o'clock he must have spoken those words which were so near his heart, or go away leaving them unspoken—for ever—seemed most likely.

And Dolores too woke on that Friday morning to a swift consciousness of the importance of this day amongst other days, and glanced with her first active thought to where the Huguenot stood, circled in a holly wreath, her eyes smiling in happy anticipation, the smile fading away a moment later, when her looks fell on the picture of broad-shouldered Jem below. This was Jem's last day.

Breakfast at the Desprez's was in the French fashion, at noon, and Jem, after a cup of coffee, went out for a solitary walk. He was not accustomed to hesitation—as a rule, one side of a question was in his opinion so distinctly better than the other, after a little consideration,—that it annoyed him to remember all the thought he had given to this subject, and apparently to no purpose; but now there should be an end of vacillation, he would go out with the distinct purpose of thinking it well over, and he would return and act as he should have decided on doing. He was not a man inclined to leave things to chance or opportunity.

He chose the public picture-gallery for his place of thought, not with a view to being influenced by his surroundings, but simply because, as it was free and open every day, it was unlikely to be occupied at that hour of the morning.

He was correct in his surmise. For two hours he was at liberty to pace up and down its length, a lazy guardian occasionally glancing in upon him,

but retiring directly he realised that he was only an English tourist.

He was not conscious of looking at the walls as he paced slowly up and down, his head slightly bent, his arms folded, in an attitude peculiar to him when in thought; but years after, when at any crisis of his life he stood in the familiar attitude, bringing all his mind to bear on the chief points of the question to be thought out, suddenly would appear from out of those hidden nooks and crannies where Memory hides her often worthless secrets, strange images, which formed a rich and varied background,—St Sebastian pierced through with many arrows, stirring battle-scenes, weeping Magdalenes, and triumphant saints; they would all crowd around him, as they did on that wintry day in the gallery at Ingelheim.

When he emerged once more into the frosty air, his mind was made up.

Better to risk everything than at some future time reproach himself for anything left unsaid. Time might at any moment alter their respective positions with no word from him: let then the word be spoken, and let the risk rest with him who spoke it.

A little excited, a little moved out of his ordinary self notwithstanding his calm, he made his way through the crowded streets to the lonely road and the Desprez's house, to become aware, as he pushed open the garden-gate, that some one was standing

on the steps—a stranger he fancied, and yet there was something familiar about the short stout figure, the spectacled face, and certainly something familiar about the loud German voice.

A moment later the recognition was mutual. “It is you, Mr Traherne,” Herr Laurentius was saying, in his most untutored English—“you don’t forget me? No, I see not.” Holding out a fat small hand. “We are here on the same business, I expect, or pleasure rather. To see the young lady—my pupil—your sister.” He hesitated just long enough before the word to give a little intention to the sentence.

“To say Good-bye to my sister—by adoption,” Jem replied, imperturbably. He had made up his mind, no old foreigners should daunt him once that was accomplished, but yet he was not pleased at this meeting. He would rather this old man had come to-morrow. Still, under the circumstances, it could make no difference.

But it did.

It is so difficult to carry out a plan under totally different circumstances; it is no use ignoring that they are powerful factors in the scheme of life.

The plan that Jem had resolved upon in the solitude of the picture-gallery was to take Dolores out after breakfast, to suggest a sleigh-drive, to hire a sleigh, and to take her away far into the country, and there lay before her all the chances that had opened out before him, the coming separation, and

the reason it held for telling her of his future hopes.

But after an interminable meal, and much following talk, and questions as to what Dolores had learnt, and how she was getting on, mingled with local gossip and scandal, he was obliged to acknowledge, when he saw that the short winter afternoon was closing in, that that plan had become impracticable.

He had been amused and interested at first, the time had slipped by unawares, now a fresh combination must be thought out, and youth is not, as a rule, swift in resolving on fresh combinations.

After lunch they had sat on smoking cigarettes when the ladies had gone. "To rest for a little," Herr Laurentius had remarked to Dolores, "and then the voice,—I must hear and judge how it is getting on."

And now Dolores, thoroughly nervous, was being comforted by Emilie in the drawing-room.

"No one else frightens me," she asserted, "but he is so——"

She hesitated for a word.

"Rough," Emilie finished. "Yes, Dolores; but think of him as if he were a great English oak, all rough outside, but so useful and true and reliable. Once," she went on, taking the girl's hand, "he had several little children, and they did not fear him, they played about him like—the leaves on the oak—you know"—smiling a little sadly, "and now they

are all dead—and so is his wife, and there are very few people left who know what a kind heart is hidden away.”

Emilie’s voice was soft ; she was thinking of the rough tones asking after Antoine, and the promise that he would go and see him.

“He is a disgrace to your father’s teaching, so he says, at least, but your father is no judge of the unlucky ones.”

Poor comfort ! and yet to her unhappy heart it was worth something. The words made her at least interpret him aright.

Shortly after, he entered the room, calling to Dolores at once to prepare to let him judge what she had learnt.

“What shall it be ?” M. Desprez questioned. He went up to the piano and patted Dolores’s hand encouragingly. “Don’t be frightened,” he said kindly, “he only wears a bear’s skin, under it he is a perfect lamb.”

“I know,” Dolores answered, with a wavering little smile towards the bearskin, “I am not frightened.”

“Bravo !” Herr Laurentius growled. “Now, Desprez, go on ; what is it to be ?”

He seated himself by Emilie, crossing his fat hands as he spoke, and prepared to listen. He had not really much doubt. M. Desprez was a good judge, and had kept him well posted in Dolores’s progress ; still he was apt to be enthusiastic, it

was as well to come at intervals and judge for himself.

Whatever two opinions there might be about M. Desprez's own work, whether in the future it would rank as high as it did at present, there was no doubt about his gift for training. Some of the finest singers of the age owed all to him, or so it pleased them to say. His style, his taste, his finish, were sought far and wide. There was a certain *cachet* of which he alone held the secret.

And on this young girl he had easily set his mark—the very enthusiasm he evoked aided her in availing herself of it. Anxious to do him credit, to show Herr Laurentius he had not been mistaken, she sang, so it seemed to Emilie, as she had never heard her sing before. Handel's music, in that pure clear voice, throbbed through the silence of the room, touching all hearts.

“Good child, good child!” Herr Laurentius said. His voice did not seem quite so gruff. “Now, you need not be frightened at any one else, because I,” tapping his chest with his fat finger, “because I—Ludwig Laurentius—am satisfied.”

Emilie kissed her flushed cheeks in a kind sisterly way, and took her over to the corner where Jem sat, away from where the two men were discussing future plans.

To Jem her voice was a revelation. All the days he had been in the house he had never asked to hear her sing. His mind had been full of other things:

he was not musical, when she went for her daily lesson, it had never struck him to follow her, or speak of it. That was indeed the most natural time to go out — when she was engaged, and could not speak to him.

But if unmusical, he was not ignorant ; he had heard many voices, and therefore could better value the tone and beauty of this one. She had always sung sweetly, but this was something very different. This, then, was what these people had done for her ; no wonder, if they had foreseen this, that at any cost they had esteemed themselves justified in taking her away from where they had found her.

So far his thoughts had run on, when, lifting his eyes, he saw the clock. Four — past four. In a couple of hours he must start, and so much yet to be done.

With sudden decision he rose and addressed Emilie, at work in the window.

“ May I take Dolly to the morning-room ? ” he asked. “ It is getting late, and there seems to be still a great deal I have to say to her.”

“ Yes, certainly. Go,” she added a minute later, “ and I will send her to you.”

He followed her suggestion, and leaving the two men still discussing the future, sauntered out of the room.

“ Dolores,” Emilie said, moving over to her, “ go to your brother in the morning-room ; he wishes to speak to you, and it is getting late.”

“Going, where are you going?” Herr Laurentius began, as he observed her departure, “stay with us.”

But at Emilie’s explanation he ceased urging, though there was a muttered “You will find us better company.”

“He is going away,” Dolores very tranquilly said, “and after that——”

“After that, what?” queried the Professor.

“Emilie will tell you,” the girl answered, with a little flash of delight illumining her face, “I must not stay.”

“Well, go on as you have begun, and you will end well, and I will come—see, I promise it—I will come all the way from wherever I may be to hear you sing the first time in public.”

“Thank you,” Dolores interrupted gently, making another little effort to escape.

“No, wait; I must tell you one thing more: you must never forget that imprisoned in every song, as in every language, there is a soul—but it takes a genius to set it free.”

And as he met Dolores’s puzzled eyes, partly at the words themselves, partly at the pronunciation—“It is a very good sentence,” he said, with satisfaction, “but you will not understand it till you are older.

“She is a nice little girl,” he added complacently, as he sat down; “and beyond that, she is going to be a handsome little girl—— Oh, not a beauty,

but a nice dark-haired, dark-eyed girl ; she will look well on the stage."

"No, not a beauty," Emilie assented, "though, after all, there are moments when I am not sure."

"It will depend a good deal on what life does for her," M. Desprez said, shrewdly. "Good fortune will do more for her than paint and powder. I never saw any one's looks depend so much on externals."

"And happiness," Emilie observed, "will do more than good fortune."

"Not much difference in my recipe and yours," her father answered.

"Oh yes," she said, quietly, but she did not lift her eyes from her work ; "all the difference between the realities of life and the mere externals."

M. Desprez looked up as if to say something, but his daughter did not lift her eyes—perhaps her words had not meant much—perhaps it would be as well not to risk an explanation of them.

When Dolores opened the morning-room door, Jem was standing by the white china stove, attracted to that part of the room by a familiar instinct which led him towards the fireplace, his head bent, his arms folded—the same attitude as that of the picture-gallery, but his thoughts were very different. He was angrily conscious that everything was against him ; that he was acting without the strong support of his judgment, and yet that there was no holding back, because of that argument

of the morning, which had brought matters to this issue.

The very words with which Dolores entered, "O Jem, how late it is!—how soon you will have to go!" The very look in her eyes was an addition to his trouble, in their unconsciousness of it; and yet justice, that strongest note in his character, forbade the feeling.

He lacked the intuition wherewith Jerome Shore in his place would have at once felt at one with the girl, and have understood her. The gift which was Jerome's would have been that of an interpreter. He would have not only understood, but *felt* the girl's happy mood; its reflection would have fallen upon him, whereas Jem could only argue out, through some strong sense of fairness and justice, that, because he was unhappy, there was no reason that she should be, and strive to remember it. Even now he hesitated, meaning to lead up to his subject; and yet, when he lifted his eyes and saw her standing before him in the little shy way he had so often noticed when she was a child at home, and he had singled her out for praise or blame, none of the hesitation he had wished for was possible.

"Dolly,"—strive as he would he was conscious by her increasing nervousness that he was frightening her by the gravity of his voice,—“all these days there has been something I have wished to tell you, and yet I have not done so.”

“They are not ill?” she faltered.

"No, no." He stretched out his hand and took hers, so slight and small, in his great strong clasp, and drew her a little nearer to him—"No, no, don't be frightened; it is something very different—about ourselves, you and me."

He looked down to see if his words, his tone, conveyed any meaning to her—no, only a quick vanishing of the fear that had crept into her eyes. She came a step nearer, looking up with evident relief.

"It begins about myself," he went on. "I have been offered a very good position in South America; very good for one of my years and small experience. Good pay, responsibility, a position of trust, which will probably, if all goes well, lead to something more——"

"Oh, dear Jem, I *am* glad!"

There was no doubt of her sympathy, her affection. If she had indeed been a sister——

"This is the reward because you have been so good and brave—I knew it always, always." Her cheeks flushed with happy pride.

"It is for two years," he said, slowly, "and I must start in a week."

She sighed. "It is a long, long time; but you will not mind, after all, you will be glad to see the world,—you always wished it." And then a moment later, "Oh, how good of you to come here!" as she realised what his words meant.

"Dolly, I promised."

There might have been a shadow of reproach in the words—a shadow of reproach in her own heart. With a sudden movement she threw her arms about his neck, and kissed him. “Oh, dear Jem, no one has ever been as good to me as you have. Home won’t be a bit like home without you!”

With her kisses, her words, almost unconsciously the brother’s tenderness was lost a little in the lover’s;—he drew her closer to him, his arm holding her against his heart, his hand smoothing her dark hair, and yet now to put the rest of his sentence into words savoured of sacrilege; as if having betrayed her into such tenderness and abandonment, he were trying to profit by it.

But time was inexorable.

“Listen, Dolly,” he said, “I have something more to say, which I should not say now, unless it were for the necessity that will prevent my speaking to you again for so long. And in two years so much may happen that I cannot now foresee.

“My father may die, our home may be broken up, you ill, unable to continue your work—oh, a thousand things. I want to tell you this, so that should any difficulty arise, you may know at once what to do.”

He paused; the words were difficult, and loosening his hold upon her, he put her at a little distance, and looked down into her wondering soft eyes.

“What I want to tell you,” he went on steadily,

“is this: when I return, my hope is that you will become my wife.”

The wonder in her eyes deepened, but she did not move.

“You are young now, too young to understand; but if you are a child, I am a man,” the steady voice faltered a little. “It has been my hope, my dream, ever since I can remember, and I meant to win you by-and-by when the time should come. But all this,” vaguely, “has altered everything. I cannot go away and leave you ignorant.”

He was silent, and looked at her as if expecting some comment on his words. There was none, unless it were the slowly retreating colour from cheeks and lips,—in her eyes the wonder had given place to a kind of terror.

“Dolly, dear,” he said, gently, “don’t look like that. My words only mean this, that if at any moment you should need help, whilst I stand on God’s earth, you may look to me for it. You will trust me more surely,” he added, “when you know that I love you.”

“Yes, yes,” she faltered.

“I have written an address on that slip of paper,” he went on, pointing to the table, “which will always find me. Should you want me, and you write and say ‘Come,’ as quickly as I can be with you, you may look to see me.”

Noticing the direction of his hand, she moved to the table and took up the envelope as if to read it,

but it was impossible ; the mist before her eyes, the beating of her heart, prevented it. She stood there in the winter dusk, a slim figure in her dark dress, her eyes still turned towards him pleadingly, or so he thought.

“Sending for me,” he said, gently, “would mean, Dolly, that you wanted my help and trusted me—nothing more. Everything else”—he paused and sighed—“will be for you to give, if you can, when you are old enough to know. I am going now,” he went on a moment later. “It is time at least that I should be thinking of it, for I have still my ‘good-byes’ to say to the others. *We* will say good-bye here : it is better.”

He drew a step nearer to her, and taking her hand, stooped his head for her accustomed kiss. “If I have troubled you,” he said, “believe it was done because I thought it best.”

The hand he held was cold and trembling, and as he touched it, he saw a sudden flame of colour mount into her white cheeks. The first fruit of his words, he knew,—the separation begun, which might possibly never be bridged across again.

There was something in the tones of his voice which spoke of his despair, when he added—“You will not let me go without a farewell kiss, Dolly, will you?—after all these years.”

She lifted her head then—her eyes were bright with tears he saw—and pressed a cold little kiss on his cheek ; but he felt all the difference between

the previous tenderness and this shy coldness, and just touching her forehead with his lips, he left the room.

But, when he re-entered the sitting-room, he was glad to find that Herr Laurentius had left. He had had an uncomfortable idea that his secret hopes were being watched growing through those spectacles. It was pleasanter, in his present frame of mind, to find only Emilie at her needlework.

He half hesitated over his good-bye, so strong was the unaccustomed longing for some expression of sympathy, the wish to say something to her, but second thoughts prevailed. In all the doubt and uncertainty that surrounded both her future and his, the fewer who knew the better.

He thanked her for her kindness to the girl, and begged of her to care for her. "She will tell you," he added, "that I am going away—for a long time. The story is a long one," as Emilie began questioning him, "and I have so little time that I will not begin it, but will leave you to hear it from her."

On his way down-stairs he paused at the head of the last flight. The cabman was carrying down his box, and there were still a few moments to spare,—plenty of time for him to go once more to the morning-room, and perhaps win some kinder good-bye.

But even when with hasty steps he had hurried down the dark passage, he was not certain of the wisdom of his act.

The shock of his words had necessarily been great, so little to lead up to them, that she had been sadly unprepared. But he had said them,—that was all that was needful. By-and-by, when he was gone, and life had settled down about her calmly again, all the terror and shyness would die out with nothing at hand to revive it, the old trust would then return, and in addition, a special added consciousness of his willingness to serve her, the knowledge of the one man on the earth to whom—should her desolate life require aid—she might safely turn and demand it.

But through all this calm reasoning was the warm human impulse stirring his heart to see her again, even if it were only to gain just such another cold farewell.

At the door he hesitated a second, his hand on the lock, before opening it. The room was now nearly dark, but in the faint light from the window he saw her, no longer standing as she had been, shyly, piteously nervous, but kneeling on the floor, her arms on the wide low window-seat, her face hidden in them.

She never heard his entrance, was unaware he was beside her, until he was so close that he could see she was sobbing as if her heart would break, and then, "Dolly," he said, gently, "poor little child, what is it?"

At his voice she lifted her head, the tears pouring down her cheeks, her arms outstretched.

“O Jem! dear Jem! I thought you had gone, and I am so unhappy! I did not know what to say to you, and you have always been so kind to me,—no one ever has been so kind.”

“There was nothing to say, Dolly.” He was kneeling beside her, with his arm round her, just, so the thought flashed through him, in the attitude in which he had often comforted her at home, when her French exercise had been incorrect or her sums ill done.

And just as she would have done then she turned her head towards him now and kissed him, the previous embarrassment forgotten in the return of the old feeling of brotherhood, which for a moment glowed and burnt up again, before vanishing into the darkness for ever.

CHAPTER XV.

“Only a child—
Wistful and sweet, and with a heart for breaking.”

WHEN Emilie, sitting alone in the room above, had heard the cab drive away, she went down-stairs to look for Dolores.

Ignorant as she was of any special cause for grief, she was nevertheless not unprepared to find her in trouble. Happy and tranquil as she knew her to be, still this glimpse of home-life was certain to have set her thinking, perhaps regretting, her childhood's friends, and, in addition, the fact that Jem had himself mentioned that he was going abroad for a long period would in itself be an additional source of trouble.

When she entered the sitting-room, Dolores had dried her tears, or rather had ceased crying, for her cheeks were wet; but she still remained crouched down on the floor by the window-seat where Jem had left her.

Emilie, after a moment's bewilderment in the darkness, moved over to her, and putting her arms

about her, kissed and strove to comfort her. There was no word from the girl, but she submitted to the caresses, as if pleased with the sympathy and tenderness.

"That is the worst of a little happiness," Emilie said softly, "that we are so loath to give it up."

"No; the worst," said Dolores, disconsolately, "is that it spoils other things. I was looking forward so much to this evening, and now I don't care anything about it."

Emilie laughed gently. She could not help it, and at the same time, without pausing to ask why, she was glad. "Well, Dolores, the wisest thing is to try and bring back those lost feelings as quickly as possible! First, we will go up-stairs and wash away these tears, and leave this dark room and talk of all sorts of pleasant things, for instance——" She paused. She had risen from the floor, and with Dolores's little cold hand in hers, was leading her safely past chairs and tables; but when they stood in the passage she added, "For instance, how well you sang this afternoon, how pleased grumpy old Herr Laurentius was, and how one of these days, about the same time that Jem returns, having made his fortune, he will find his little sister on the way to make hers."

"Do you believe it?" Dolores asked earnestly. "Sometimes, Emilie, I don't think myself that I shall ever succeed."

"Why not?" But without waiting for an answer,

“It does not do to whisper that here,” Emilie went on, a most unaccustomed note of bitterness in her voice; “success is the watchword of this house.”

Dolores looked up surprised, but Emilie’s look was calmer than her words, and the surprise passed as swiftly as it had come.

However heavy her trouble had seemed to Dolores during the day, there is no doubt that it had ceased for the moment to weigh very heavily, when at length she found herself in Miss Shore’s drawing-room. The familiar dull red walls and gleaming weapons formed a background to-night to an unusual scene, and there were already several people present in strange dresses of a former time,—to Dolores, not the more or less well-devised and carried-out costumes of a fancy ball, but the visible representation of a brilliant dream. For the first moment it was all too unreal for her to associate this elderly powdered Marquise with stout good-natured Lady Ellesmere, this slight flippant creature—covered with jingling bells—with her daughter Fanny. Powder and paint, diamonds and rouge, can do so much, remedy so much, that to one spectator, at any rate, they sufficed to efface the work of time.

Yes; powder and paint can certainly do a great deal, can transform the plain into the beautiful, and the beautiful—— “Who can this be?” Dolores found herself wondering, as through the curtained opening a new figure entered on the scene. This grey-haired crone, bowed and wrinkled, leaning on

her stick, her straight brows drawn into a dark bar across her lined forehead.

"Cross my hand with silver, pretty lady," it was the old gipsy's voice, "and I'll answer the question in your eyes."

The old gipsy's voice certainly, and yet as certainly—no, it was impossible! Dolores turned her startled eyes on the crone. Looked at her from head to foot, and still glanced nervously again to the eyes, before she faltered "Miss Shore?"

"One success," she answered. "*You* did not know me, even now you doubt! And you, Excellency, now for your opinion also."

"After the honest ingenuous opinion of childhood, is it worth while?"

"Certainly; I want the effect on experience as well as on ignorance."

"The guarded and the unguarded expression of it, you mean, I suppose? I should marvel more, if I were not prepared for perfection in any character that Miss Shore may choose to adopt."

For one instant Virginia's eyes met his with a half doubt.

"Your compliments are so ambiguous, Excellency; but, of course, that is the perfection of diplomacy, one of its many difficult acquirements, or perhaps," smiling, "its *most* difficult."

"You hit hard, Miss Shore."

"*Hit back* hard, perhaps you mean? That is, in

truth, a compliment. But tell me quickly why are *you* not disguised—how did you escape the universal decree?”

“My age, Miss Shore, stood me in good stead. It sometimes has its advantages.”

“It is very unfair,” she replied; “there should be no exceptions. Fooling should be universal, the exceptions hold too great an advantage.”

“Do you think the world does not show to advantage when fooling?”

“It may do, but one should be sane one’s self to enjoy insanity in others, and that is the advantage you will hold over us.”

“And what does Miss Dolores think of it all?” his Excellency asked, turning to the girl, whose shy eyes were roving round the room as if in search of some one. She scarcely heard his question, did not answer it at least, and as he watched her, he saw the expression suddenly change to one of heartfelt admiration, and following her gaze, he saw Jerome Shore, in his beautiful Huguenot dress, had entered the room. His keen glance, half amused, half cynical, travelled round, noting in quick succession all those present, every one with a slight consciousness of personal satisfaction in their own appearance, every one so evidently full of his or her own success, and then returned to Dolores’s frank admiring eyes. Just for a moment they paused there, and then he glanced towards Virginia, as if to read there a reflection of his own thought, but Virginia was not look-

ing in that direction, she had also noted her brother's entrance.

"Come, Jerome," she called, "come over here and let us admire you." And obedient to her call he came at once.

Dolores's fascinated eyes were still bent on him, and Virginia, observing it, now added, as he approached, "Here is one, at least, who has only praise to bestow, I am sure," and then she moved away, leaving Dolores to answer for herself.

His Excellency did not go; he waited to hear the admiration put into words, the young shy voice say, "How beautiful! I never imagined it would have been so beautiful in reality: it was kind of you to arrange for me to come!"

"It did not require much arrangement," Jerome said, kindly, "we were only too glad you should come if you cared to."

He certainly was looking very handsome to-night; the rich velvet suited him, and enhanced the fairness of his complexion. There was little to wonder at in Dolores's admiring glances, and she had nothing else, or but little else, to give. She was too much excited to speak, could scarcely, indeed, think of appropriate answers to his explanations of the dresses of those present.

"Have you had any coffee? No; well there is still a quarter of an hour, plenty of time for us to enjoy a cup. Come," and because he said "Come," she followed him to the curtained recess, though eat-

ing and drinking seemed as unnecessary and unsuitable as if in truth she were in fairyland. Until her slight dark figure had disappeared by the side of her brilliant companion, his Excellency watched her. Virginia's voice disturbed his thoughts—

“His Excellency in a reverie. Already, I fear, getting ready his criticisms.”

“It is not, I admit, a suitable moment for thinking of unanswerable questions.”

“And what is the question? There may be an answer, after all.”

“Probably there is,” he replied, “but we are all too young, or too old, to give it. Which is the sadder, hope or experience? I was just deciding that outwardly, at least, experience has a way of seeming the sadder of the two,—but I doubt it really.”

“Yes, you are right,” Virginia retorted, quickly, “we are all too old or too young;—because Hope has always been dead and buried for years, before we realise that Experience has taken his place. I am getting ready a few trite sayings for to-night,” she added, after a moment's almost imperceptible pause, “that is the duty of a gipsy, to convert truisms into personalities.”

“Yes,” assented his Excellency, “it is wonderful how commonplaces are always new, if they only fit our peculiar case. I suppose because we all imagine we are different from every one else, and are surprised to find that previous experiences fit our own.”

“It is gratifying, of course, to believe we are ex-

ceptions, instead of just the same as our neighbours ! Ah, here is Monsieur Desprez ! Now that we are all assembled, I suppose we ought to be starting. And what do you think of me with my added years ? Do I carry them well ? ”

“ I am told it is you, Miss Shore,” M. Desprez replied, “ but even yet I hesitate to believe the evidence of my eyes.”

“ I did not believe mine,” his Excellency interpolated ; “ it took the additional evidence of my ears to convince me.”

“ His Excellency is going as the Diplomat, the *Stage* Diplomat,” Virginia explained, “ and is reading up the character. The right word in the right place—and you, M. Desprez, I see, have adopted the costume of Maitre Longeau.”

For M. Desprez had chosen to represent a well-known character in one of his own operettas, that had been the delight of Ingelheim during the previous winter.

“ It is very becoming,” she added, “ which I am afraid mine is not ; but then mine is a disguise, which yours is not.”

So saying, she pulled her tall hat closer over her forehead, put on a pair of great brass-rimmed spectacles, stooped a little more under her dark cloak, and leaning on her stick, took a step nearer to him.

“ Miss Shore,” M. Desprez exclaimed, enthusiastically, “ why don’t you go on the stage ? It is a waste

of talent for you to be anywhere else. Don't you agree, Excellency?"

"Oh, it is not wasted," his Excellency returned. "It is a talent that is needed everywhere. But we must be going, at least I must."

"I suppose it is getting late," Virginia said, resuming her natural voice and manner. "M. Desprez, we must say good night to your young ladies. Ah, here comes one," as Dolores, Jerome still by her side, approached them.

"How does your pupil get on?" his Excellency asked.

"Well, well. She is going to be the comfort of my old age."

"And do you expect," Virginia asked, looking critically at the young glad face, which reflected so clearly the joy and satisfaction of the moment—"do you expect to make an actress of her as well as a singer?"

"It must be done," M. Desprez replied, "but I allow it will be hard work. Now, why, why are not talents granted where they are so much needed?"

"Persuade Miss Shore to give her lessons," suggested his Excellency.

"You flatter," she retorted, "but I love flattery, and am immediately inclined to try. Though one may know a great deal without being able to teach it."

"But example," his Excellency murmured, "don't

leave that out of the question. Example is proverbially better than precept."

"They are talking about you—or us," Jerome observed; and then, when he noted the quick shade of anxiety in Dolly's eyes, "As we have not done anything wrong, we have the sure consolation of knowing that it is a chorus of praise. I suppose the truth is we ought to go, for Virginia has to be in the ballroom by ten."

"You see in me a new taskmaster," Virginia said gaily, as they approached. "M. Desprez is so overcome by my stage talents that he has asked me to give you lessons. So now, Dolores, to do me credit you will have to become an actress."

"Limit your instructions to the stage," his Excellency added.

The colour came and went quickly in Dolores's cheeks as she met Virginia's half-laughing gaze, and became aware of his Excellency's quiet critical look. Answers always came slowly to her, and to Virginia's speeches she often found it impossible to reply—words seemed to require so much forethought to speak to one who so embodied perfection.

"I don't think——" she began, falteringly.

Jerome was aware directly, with quick sympathy, of her shifting colour and faltering voice. "Lessons," he interposed, "fancy talking of lessons to-night, when we are all enjoying ourselves. Virginia is so fond of teaching," he went on, confidentially, "that she is always longing to get hold of a new pupil.

Now, if she will only devote some of her spare time and abundant energies to teaching you, I suppose I shall escape."

His ready words relieved the nervous silence. M. Desprez, perhaps also conscious of the state of affairs, added kindly, "Whoever teaches Dolores will find her a very willing little pupil," touching her hand kindly as he spoke. "We gladly give her holidays, because we know she won't abuse them. But it is bedtime, I am sure, except for revellers."

"Yes, yes, I am sure it is."

Virginia gathered her cloak about her and resumed her stoop, and with a slight wave of her hand to those around, and a nod and a smile to Dolores, turned away. In the general move that followed, Jerome placed Dolores's hand on his arm.

"I will take you to your carriage first," he said, "there is plenty of time."

With M. Desprez and Emilie following, he took her down the private staircase which led to these rooms. It was entirely deserted, every one was busy in the other part of the Palace.

All the way Dolores was trying to frame some grateful words for the kindness that had given her this enchanted hour; but it was only when they had reached the carriage that she was able to stammer out some inconsequent unsatisfactory words.

They were alone; Emilie and M. Desprez still lingered above, speaking some last words.

He put her into the carriage, and it came over him again, as it did now and then, that one day she would be a very pretty woman; as it was, the soft eyes and delicate oval face were very winning. "Don't say 'thank you,' please," he said, "or else I must say it back, because I have enjoyed it also very much. I wish—shall I tell you what I wish?" resting his hand on the window-frame, "well, I wish that you were coming this evening."

She gave a little pleased sigh at the idea, such a vague impossible idea, and yet it was delightful to hear it expressed.

She was not shy with him, no one ever was, as he had himself told her.

"Would it not be delightful?" she said, leaning a little further forward. "But it would not be much use," she added, "because I don't know how to dance."

"But that is very wrong, and must be set right at once. I'll tell you what, after Virginia has given you *her* lessons, whatever they may be, we must have dancing lessons—and then you will be ready for the next ball."

She gave a little low laugh at the words, and at the same moment M. Desprez appeared.

"Captain Shore, you ought not to be here," he said, "you will be late. Miss Shore has gone on."

"Fortunately, my costume does not require me to limp, and crawl, and stoop, and do thousands of

things to which I am unaccustomed: I shall be there as soon as she is. Good night," with a bow that included them all, but after he had so said, and had half turned away, he looked back, and stretching out his hand, took Dolores's slight fingers in his, and "Good night," he said again.

CHAPTER XVI.

“Decisive action is seen by appreciative minds to be frequently objectless, and sometimes fatal ; but decision, however suicidal, has more charm for a woman than the most equivocal Fabian success.”

ELEVEN o'clock had struck. The ballroom of the Palace was a brilliant scene, as in the soft shaded light the company danced in their quaint dresses, watched and commented on by those who stood aloof. Amongst these was the Princess, who, as a rule, never danced ; but to-night etiquette was a little relaxed, and although it was an open secret who was the lady so closely veiled, yet for the moment there was supposed to be ignorance on the subject. At midnight, when supper would be served, it was understood that all masks were to be removed. In the meantime, there were the usual mistakes and discomfitures likely to arise on such occasions.

For a little while all these *contrctemps* had amused the Princess : the secrets of those present had been mostly discovered for her by Virginia, who, wandering about in her gipsy guise, unrecognised by nearly every one, had proved a ready source of amusement.

But Virginia had disappeared, and the Princess, unaccustomed to walking alone, felt nervous about leaving her present position and starting on a tour of inspection. Though reflection told her that, after all, where she was, in a gallery that overlooked the ballroom, she only needed to take the initiative, and ask some passing cavalier for his escort; movement would certainly be better than sitting here, with nothing pleasanter to think of than the troubles of life. The glamour of light and excitement was on all present; seen from the outside it seemed to her that every one was happy except herself, that in some way she was standing alone outside the warmth and companionship of life, and that its secret of happiness was denied to her alone.

Sweeping over her came a sudden, wild, unreasoning terror of the future; in a momentary panic she saw herself grown older, her beauty faded, left alone, the attraction of youth and loveliness a mere memory, and with the thought came an echo of the passionate voice to which she had refused to listen. Banish it as she might, there were moments when it would make itself heard. In the silence of the night, sometimes even as she played with her child—there seemed no security left for her anywhere. It was speaking now, through the strains of the music and the murmur of many voices, through everything alike it was distinctly audible. She roused herself impatiently, unconsciously framing indignant replies to the haunting tones which she had banished, forbidden a hear-

ing for evermore; and with the intention of diverting her mind, leant forward, resting her arms on the velvet-covered balustrade, and looked down on to the crowd below. The valse was over, the strains of music had given place to the murmur of voices; standing where she stood, there was a good view to be obtained of the dancers as they made their way towards the conservatories and cooler rooms beyond.

Thus idly watching, she began giving names to the passers-by; with Virginia's hints to help, it was not very difficult, and the comments of two ladies seated near her were also an assistance. They were both alike dressed in black, not young, she guessed from voice and figure, but in their Spanish mantillas and small masks they were too much disguised for recognition. Their words and comments amused her; it was evident that she herself was unrecognised, for she caught one whispered question, "Do you know the dress of the Princess?"

"No, but I have been told that later on she will appear as the 'Grey Lady.'"

She smiled as she thought of the complications a suggestion of Virginia's quick brain was likely to give rise to, and the thought roused her. It was not to stand thus aloof from the unaccustomed freedom and brightness that she had disguised herself in her present sober Puritan attire; her bright blond hair, so easily recognisable, safely hidden away under a cap, a velvet mask further securing her from recog-

dition. The dance just over was a good moment for joining unperceived with those leaving the ballroom: the narrow staircase that led from the gallery terminated close by the ballroom door.

Turning away, her eyes once more fell carelessly on those below; the room was now much emptier, those who were left were wandering about in couples: one tall man's figure, standing close to the doorway, was conspicuous in its solitariness.

Clothed in black from head to foot, there was, despite the carefully hidden features and long domino, something familiar about the figure which attracted her, and made her look again. A momentary passing resemblance, of course, that was all; but it was sufficiently strong to make her linger, and to quicken her heart-beats as she leant against the balcony.

He did not move. Half hidden by a long draping curtain, he stood motionless amid the surrounding movement, as if he were only a spectator, and held no part in the entertainment. Then suddenly he stirred, as if only just realising the dance was over, and that his position so close to the doorway was an inconvenient one, and took a step away, and as he did so, with a quick movement he drew his dark cloak closer about him. Just a swift momentary gesture, but it rendered visible to the watching eyes above a plain dark ring on the slender hand.

She started then, stood upright with swift determination, the red forsaking cheeks and lips as she

glanced nervously round to recognise with a glad sense of freedom that she stood alone, that no one was at hand to comment on her actions or wonder at her emotion.

He was here, there was no longer any room for doubt. He had ventured here for her sake, of that surely there was also no doubt, though after all there was a doubt deep down in her heart, only she would not listen to it—not now, not now ! For these few moments let her think of him as braving this for her sake, and if such were the case, then the choice which had once before been hers to make, and which had seemingly passed into the irrevocable, might now be recalled and reconsidered.

“Calmly, freely, let me think,” she said. Calmly, with the tumult of her heart deafening all other sounds, except the memory of that passionate voice which she had determined to forget. “There is no doubt”—so clearly the words sounded, that she almost fancied she must be saying them aloud—“there is no doubt,—I cannot live without him.”

Still with wildly beating heart and quick-coming breath, she rose and looked again where he had stood, but he had disappeared—and even as she looked, a little tinkling clock behind her chimed the quarter. Time that the “Grey Lady” appeared : in such a life, the rules of life are habits not lightly put aside, she turned to seek her own apartments, there was an entrance from the gallery. After all, it was but postponing those words she meant to say.

His disguise would be no disguise for her, probably hers none for him. Did not every one know the costume in which she was to appear. It had been whispered, she was certain, far beyond the Palace gates.

That quick gesture that had betrayed his secret to the watching eyes above, had told it to another. Virginia Shore, loitering by the doorway, had also noted the solitary figure standing apart from the world, taking no share in its revels, and had wondered for a moment who he might be. A momentary wonderment, relieved a second later by that passing glimpse of the fateful ring.

"So this was the secret," thus ran her thoughts, "that they had been keeping from her." It had been his own wish of course that she should be kept in ignorance of his presence here, Jerome had merely obeyed; but it annoyed her to think that he should have succeeded, and that the only secret of any importance under this roof to-night should have escaped her. But not for long: it was hers now, and with a secret in one's possession, one is always sure of having gained something. "How incautious men are!" she thought, and something about the boldness of the action won from her unwilling admiration. This she felt sure was no design of Jerome's, probably he did not even know of his presence to-night. "Did the Princess know?" she wondered. "Well, she would soon find out." So confident was she of

her own disguise, that she felt little fear of his recognising her. She drew a step nearer, and in a quavering voice asked, "Would the gentleman like to learn his fortune?"

She spoke in French, and for a moment he did not seem to realise her words were addressed to him. But when she repeated her sentence, he echoed, "Like? No, I don't think I should like it."

"The gentleman fears it," she said, insinuatingly, "but let me read it all the same. But not here; this way," turning into a conservatory dimly lit with Chinese lanterns, "in here, where no one will overhear us."

He followed her obediently in silence, until she paused in a dark shadowy corner, where for the moment they were virtually alone, the only sound the rippling of a small fountain amongst the flowers.

"You must tell me something good, Mother," he said, lightly.

"Cross my hand with what you value most," she said, extending hers, cleverly browned and wrinkled, "and I will do my best."

"I will try to bribe Fortune; this is the most valuable thing I have about me," and so saying, laid in her hand a queer old coin.

"But not that which you value most," she said, quietly, looking at it. "It is French?"

"Yes, and you also, I think," ignoring her other words.

"And why, I wonder?"

"It is the land of clever women."

"And you think it is a sign of cleverness to guess that a man would not offer that which he values most to bribe Fortune. Fortune is a woman, sir, and every man knows that he need not offer even to her his best."

"Fortune is a woman, Mother, you are right. It is foolish, therefore, not to try and bribe her."

"Yes," she assented, "and, like other women, she knows that which you hold back. But give me your hand, no, the left." She bent her head lower over it, but the ring was gone. Probably he had recalled by how many it might be recognised, and had withdrawn it. But the hand itself there was no mistaking — supple, slender, brown, she could have sworn to it anywhere.

"It is an unlucky hand, I am afraid," he said; "I don't think the best wishes in the world will make it otherwise. But, as you suggest, bribery may succeed where good wishes would not."

"I have no wishes," she replied, "good or bad; I am as impartial as Fate."

"Do not say so, pray, for Fate is my enemy."

"If so, you braved a very powerful enemy in coming here to-night."

He started, and drawing his hand away, peered at her more closely in the dim light, but the crouching, bunched-up form under the shrouding cloak was impossible of identification.

But at that nervous glance round, "Do not fear," she said, in the same low voice; "very often the tones we attribute to Fate are merely the echo of our own fears."

"You are a witch indeed, I believe," he said, with an uneasy laugh. "Is your name a secret?" bending nearer.

"More secret than yours," she answered, calmly.

"If you know so much," he said, quickly, "you know all."

"I have old eyes, sharpened, not dulled with age, and they have told me a great deal. They have betrayed to me many secrets here to-night, hidden from those younger,—even yours, carefully guarded as you thought it was."

For a second he was silent, and then speaking hurriedly, "Are you a friend or an enemy?" he asked.

"To unmask is *de rigueur* later on—you can then judge. It is *de rigueur* for all," she added, significantly.

"Yes." But he was not heeding, his eyes were bent on the ground. He was thinking, trying to recall the voice, which, though disguised, had yet a familiar ring. There was the slightest rustle, almost inaudible through the sounds of those moving about and the ripple of the fountains, and looking up, it was to find that she had disappeared. "Miss Shore!" Like an electric flash the name shot into

his brain. "Of course." Instinctively he hated the thought that she should have discovered his presence, but he had no doubt of her identity, from the first moment he was assured.

"What use would she make of her knowledge?" Some intuition prompted him to the consciousness that she would not betray him—that her discovery would merely serve to amuse and interest her, and the recognition of the fact made him wince as if in pain.

But she had served to remind him of one fact, and that was that he must make his escape soon, or he ran every chance of discovery; though first, at any cost, he must discover the disguise of the one woman he had come to see. He had half a mind now to brave everything, and ask Jerome, but the fear of complications, and of Jerome's complicity in his presence being suspected, stopped him. And he was entirely ignorant. No one knew—no one had known, at any rate, until Virginia had discovered him.

He had avoided every one; profiting by Jerome's previous conversations, he had been enabled to recognise most of his friends, and now probably he had missed his best chance, for if any one could have enlightened him on what he wanted to know, it would have been Virginia. With the swiftly passing time he felt himself growing reckless. What difference could it make now? Well, the only thing was to seek

out Miss Shore again—she was easily discoverable—and ask her to tell him. But he sought in vain. The gipsy had vanished, not a trace of her could he discover, though he looked for her in every room.

But at last Fortune favoured him—a few words of conversation reached his ears, and gave him the clue for which he sought.

“The Princess.” He caught the words and turned his head. “As the ‘Grey Lady,’” the voice went on. “Oh no, there is very little secret about it. Every one knows it. Miss Shore told me. She is to appear at midnight.”

“Very uncanny,” her companion said, “but we may as well go and await the apparition.” And at a little distance the dark-clad figure followed them.

Up-stairs in her room, the finishing touches given to her dress, her maids dismissed, the Princess still lingered, trying to moderate the sense of recklessness that possessed her, and which for the moment made her willing to believe she was ready to give up all for love. Such love as her ill-regulated passion-tossed heart was now experiencing. Ambition previously had won the victory, in such a nature a strong, hard-fought, hard-won victory; but now the sudden reaction from the long silence and absence had wrought a swift change in her mode of thought. It was of all she would gain,

not of all she would have to give up, she was thinking to-night.

She drew near to the tall mirror, and through the shrouding draperies of her disguise looked at herself, a faint, shadowy, "Grey Lady," by a cunning adjustment of shrouding veils, her face almost invisible, in truth, a ghostly figure. Standing thus, she lifted the veil, and for a moment looked into the blue eyes that looked back at her, no longer restless and discontented, but burning and passionate.

A beautiful woman—in the full light which fell on the crown of red-gold hair; on the delicate contour of the cheeks, where, for the moment, was a faint tinge of unaccustomed colour, on the rich outlines of her figure.

A woman, outwardly at least, well worth a man's love; a woman not likely to offer love in vain. Some such thought flashed through her mind, the colour deepened a little on her cheeks, a quick sigh parted her lips. She dropped the veil, drawing its thick folds together across her face with her hand, and turned to the door.

The great hall—out of which rose the principal staircase, lined with flowers, amid which showed the gleam of marble figures—was to-night the chief meeting-place outside the ballroom, which was entered from one side of it, a conservatory from the other. Amongst its orange-trees and myrtles, at

the foot of the staircase, his Excellency stood watching the scene around, now and then exchanging comments with those he recognised, or random words with some mask, whose disguise he had failed to penetrate.

It was here, in the company of the foreign Prince, he was to await the arrival of the Princess, who, after changing her dress, was to descend by the private stairway and join them, for the purpose of opening the supper-room.

The time was drawing near, and he moved over to the entrance to the stairway to be ready; standing thus, he was just opposite the conservatory. The wide doors were open; from the cool semi-dark shade beyond came a delicious fragrant perfume of jessamine and oranges, a breath of coolness into the hot air outside, in its half-lit depths showed the vague colours of flowers. For the moment all was still; the dancers had returned to the ballroom, distant valse strains had recommenced, alone, not far from where he was waiting, motionless almost as the form of the knight in armour by which he stood, was the figure of a man. Waiting also, so it seemed to his Excellency, and he looked at him, idly wondering for whom. Not for long. Suddenly, between him and the mail-clad knight, so suddenly that he had no time to wonder how or whence, there appeared the figure of a shrouded veiled woman, so closely veiled that nothing was visible but

the outline of her form, and a hand clasping the folds of the veil before her face. In the half-light of the place there was something vague and ghostly in her movements.

She glided nearer to the man then. Did she speak, or only beckon with her hand? It was impossible to tell, but if there were doubt about *her* words, there was none about his. Every syllable reached the listener's ears, as the man bent his head, but his voice, though low and unsteady, was clear enough.

"Do you know who I am?" There was no reply except a slight affirmative movement of the head, and the grey figure passed away into the shadow of the conservatory, the man closely following.

The voice, the figure, his Excellency was so bewildered by all they revealed, that for a second he stood as if just awaked from dreaming, and then the realisation of the woman's disguise occurring to him, it was with a quick startled look that he turned towards the staircase. "Had she for whom he waited passed him unawares?" No, no need to ask. Facing him on the lowest stair stood just such another veiled figure as had but now passed before him, but this time the veil was lifted. Not to look at him—no, the wild despair which met his glance was not for him; he was unseen, unnoticed at least, by those eyes that followed those two disappearing

forms. Only for a moment that glimpse of passionate despair, then the veil was dropped, and her hand had clasped his arm, something of the agony he had seen perceptible in its nervous grasp, something of it also in the low hoarse word, "Wait."

He waited as she bade him, quietly, silently, the soft melody of the valse coming softened by distance, and the quickened breathing of the woman by his side the only sounds. He knew how she was shaken by the throbbing of her pulses, that shook the hand on his arm, the laces that shrouded her.

He did not quite interpret the riddle aright; he was too startled, too agitated himself to do so, and besides he did not know all.

He thought he recognised warring pride and unavowed love struggling over the fact of his presence here, uncertain by which name to call it. He did not know of the stormy battle her passionate nature had been so lately fighting—and all the story those few overheard words had revealed.

"Excellency," at last she spoke, her voice was low but quite steady. "You promised once,"—and then, altering her sentence, "His presence here in my own house is an insult, which I shall never forgive."

"It is a folly, Princess," the old man replied, "of which none of his friends were aware."

"An insult," she repeated, coldly. She had put back her veil, and the feverish colour on her cheeks, and the light in her eyes contradicted the calmness

of her words, "and to you I must give the unpleasant task of telling him so. My house is only open to my friends. Also at the same time please let it be known that the hour for unmasking has come. The Prince is ready; I fear I have kept him waiting."

Life must be lived anyhow—at high or low pressure; its moments of torture as those of its highest happiness, and generally, to accompany its supreme moments, is some trivial necessity to be accomplished.

That evening, with its talk and laughter and music and light, was part of the discipline of life to the Princess: perhaps she had never had so entirely to lay self aside, pride alone demanded it, but it was not pride that spoke loudest, when at last, her part played out, she was once more alone, where earlier in the evening she had looked in the mirror at her own beauty. No, pride was pushed aside by bitter, heart-rending jealousy. She had renounced, but not for this, and her own fears had prophesied it long ago. Despite their intimacy, there was no cordiality in her relations with Virginia Shore. The world was right that credited her with fearing Virginia's clear-seeing eyes and unsparing tongue.

But to say we have wrought our own woe is not a road by which to escape its consequences. Mingling with the angry hurt pride and cruel jealousy, was a more womanly sensation of despair, that she had allowed the best to pass her by. Not the furious

passion of the other night, when he had stolen in upon her solitude and forced her to listen to his words, only a sense of desolation at the thought of her own loneliness, which brought painful tears to her eyes. Pity jealousy—it needs pity ; it is only love become unmanageable, and is pitiable, like any other passion that has passed beyond control.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.





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